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**The Gordian knot; a story of good and of**



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*Margaret Spencer*

London, Richard Bentley & Co.

THE  
GORDIAN KNOT:

A Story of Good and of Evil.

BY  
SHIRLEY BROOKS.

“Ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις οὐκ ἦν βασιλεὺς ἐν Ἰσραὴλ ἄνθρωπος τὸ εὐθεὲς ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐποίει.”

~~~~~  
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN TENNIEL.  
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G R N E L L  
UNIVERSITY  
LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1860.

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CB

LONDON :  
SAVILL AND EDWARDS, PRINTERS,  
CHANDOS STREET.

TO

MARK AND HELEN LEMON.

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MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I have strong claims to the right of inscribing this book with your names.

Years back, a pleasant and valuable literary connexion with one of you originated a cordial friendship with both ; and, if I am happy to say that I see no prospect of a termination of the first, I am still happier to believe in the impossibility of an interruption of the second.

Then, if I add that a large, and to me the most agreeable portion of this volume, was composed in the quiet and delightful Sussex retreat which you have chosen, and while I was enjoying the kindest hospitalities of your household, I think that I have made out my claim to sign myself, in this public manner,

Your obliged and attached Friend,

SHIRLEY BROOKS.

*The Temple.*





## P R E F A C E.

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CIRCUMSTANCES seem to require a few prefatory words from me, on the completion of this novel.

A considerable interval has occurred between the issue of two of the portions into which the tale was divided for the purpose of serial publication.

For this delay I am solely answerable, and it may be well that I should state its cause.

Few who know me and my occupations will be inclined to suppose me to have been indolent, or negligent of work undertaken by me. The interruption to the issue of "The Gordian Knot" was occasioned by influences of an exactly opposite description.

During its progress, I was induced to think that the acceptance of certain other literary engagements, of a different character, would not interfere with my devoting to the tale now published the full time which I had set apart for its composition. Nor did they, nor would I have permitted them to do so. But I am convinced that I underestimated the difficulty of suddenly turning from the various and exciting duties and pleasures of journalism to the lines upon which a writer who aspires to be an artist lays down a work of extended character, and that it is not quite so easy as some persons believe to comply with the summons of the almanac to forget active and polemical occupation for certain days of labour of an utterly distinct nature. I found that my work upon this novel became less and less easy to execute, and when an interruption, caused by a domestic affliction, occurred, the resumption of the fiction became more difficult than I had supposed was possible. Finally, and with much regret, I was compelled, in justice to myself, to defer the completion of my book until I could devote to it the due leisure and attention.

This is, in all frankness, my own answer to the incessant inquiry

“why that book was not done.” It is now right that I should do justice to my excellent publisher, who I know has had frequently to answer that question, sometimes urged with a pertinacity less agreeable to him than flattering to me. I beg not only to exculpate Mr. Bentley from the slightest blame in the matter of the delay, but to say that so high was his estimate of my ability to complete my book at earlier dates, that at one time he contemplated the bringing to bear upon me the influence of an eminent and admirable nobleman—may I name Lord Chelmsford—whose equitable suggestions it was thought might expedite the progress of my invention.

Shall I add, to those of my own craft and fellowship who may do me the honour to examine the construction of my book, that I trust they will easily perceive that though there was delay in its completion, there has been sedulous adherence to the original design.

S. B.

*December, 1859.*

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# THE GORDIAN KNOT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### SOME INTRODUCTIONS.

THE first time that Philip Arundel saw Miss Spencer was in the course of a *fête* given, on the bank of the Thames, by the manager of one of the opera-houses. But the first time that I saw little Margaret Spencer was nine years earlier, and at the door of a dissenters' chapel in a pleasant town in Shropshire.

In days when there were miles in England, the little quiet borough, St. Oscars, was nearly two hundred miles from the great noisy city, London. Now it is about six hours away, and these, I am told, seem at least twelve to any traveller who is not rich enough to take his seat on first-class cushions. The hard boards, keen draughts, and general misery of the inferior carriages lead him, let us hope, to reflect upon his unworthiness in not having deserved—and consequently obtained—the blessings of riches, and induce him to register his vow that, should he survive the journey, he will devote himself with renewed energy to the struggle of life. If petulant philanthropists object to the deduction of this moral from the sufferings of the humbler traveller under our present locomotive arrangements, I am very sorry, but have no other that could be at all acceptable to respectability.

In the time when I first knew St. Oscars, we went thither by his Majesty's mail—red coach—red guard—red driver—four spanking horses, which during the night were changed, as it seemed to the aroused sleeper, every five minutes—snorting horn at the turnpikes and in the towns—horribly cold feet in the morning—very high fares—extortionate fees—good refreshment on the road—and everybody heartily glad when the business was over. Those are the items which chiefly compose my recollections of the long journey, but as I went up and down several times, it would not be difficult to remember that one coachman told stupid stories with much good-nature and desire to lighten the way for you; that a particular guard kept a private French horn, and when we were away from towns would perform the then fashionable melody wedded to Mr. Bayley's hankering for existence in another and a butterfly world; that at one or two inns there were one or two pretty girls, or girls whose fresh and cheerful faces looked pretty to people who were bored with ugly or sulky fellow-travellers; that there was a good deal of honest excitement in the

rapid motion, when the horses were sprung over a hard bit of road, and the blood was stirred and the eye brightened by a pace at which did the slowest of railway drivers now dare to crawl, he would be saluted by howls of disapprobation from his plebeian passengers, while their betters would sit devising venomous beginnings for accusing letters to *The Times*. These incidents are not worth a great deal, but there was one good feature in the old mode of travelling, and the only one which can reasonably be urged in its favour. You saw England. When you dived into the smoky hearts of her manufacturing counties, or rattled into the decorous capitals of her garden provinces, when you took hamlet, or borough, or cathedral city in your way, when you were only careering along her noble roads and catching church, hill, or river as you passed, you were gaining an idea of the face of the mother-land. And the few minutes of stoppage in the towns were, to any one who knew how to use them, invaluable opportunities for fixing the town in memory for the rest of one's life. All this is over, and we have a far better system instead (especially for first-class passengers); but even with the best corner in the railway carriage, the rug over one's knees, the strapful of books on the untenanted cushion before you, the newspaper, duly paper-knifed at the station, and all the comfort of the journey, one confesses to wincing as the train passes the board inscribed with the name of some fine old town, which one is not likely to make a journey to see, but which, taken on the road, would have linked itself to historical reminiscences, and made itself one of the illustrations to one's private edition of the Chapter of Kings.

St. Oscars has probably been altered since these days. I have heard something of a new church, a literary institution, a botanic garden, a newspaper, and other innovations. I can only say that I hope the St. Oscarians are happier for the change. I do not know why they should be. We did remarkably well in my time, with the old church and without the improvements. The church was damp, and one in which it was difficult to hear; but the good vicar preached short sermons, and had ones, so that we got away soon and lost little. He did not like preaching, that is a lamentable fact, but he liked visiting the sick, and helping the poor, and seeing the children enjoy themselves. The evangelical minister of the next parish thought the Doctor's chances in the next world were indifferent; but very few of us agreed with him, and every dissenter put up a shutter on the day of the vicar's funeral, and a Particular-Baptist, also a stonemason, offered a beautiful slab of marble for the mural tablet. As for our reading, people read the books they had, and then read them again—and so did the late Lord Dudley and Ward, protesting against being told to buy new books. But we knew all that was going on. Several of us joined to take a London paper, and it arrived in the middle of the day after its publication, quite soon enough for any good news it had to tell. Besides, there were the county papers, Whig and Tory—but we did not think much of them, for we knew the editors, and distrusted the Whig's arguments because his father had been bankrupt, and disbelieved much that the Tory said because he had a wooden leg—editors should be more mysterious. We certainly had no botanic garden, and indeed one of our stock stories, at which

every one laughed, was directed against a great lady neighbour, who had spoken of a red daisy (quite correctly) as a *bellis fistulosa*, and the St. Oscarians must have changed much if they admire wooden tickets with barbarous Latin polysyllables tied to inoffensive shrubs. Indeed, they must have altered a great deal if they support a local newspaper, for we never did anything that was worth telling, or that we thought so. It is the new generation of vestrymen and municipal lawgivers that require *verbatim* shorthand accounts (a great deal fuller than the Parliamentary reports) of their squabbles about the hearthstones for cleaning the church steps, and brooms to cleanse the pig-market. We could fight over these things too, and could impute motives, and be as offensive and abusive as our successors, but we did not have our quarrelling written down and printed, as is now the custom with provincial councils. As I have said, St. Oscars must have altered. One thing which I have heard convinces me of the fact even more than any of the evidence I have cited. We had two public clocks in the place—one the church-clock, and the other a clock on the town-hall. The consecrated works were confided to one clock-maker, and the secular wheels to another. Less than five minutes' walk took you from one building to the other, but there was always more than five minutes' difference between the clocks. The reason of this was that the two artificers hated each other, and each kept his time at a hostile distance from that of the other. The clerical regulator would never recognise the existence of the other one, and it was merely to annoy the poor old man that he was sometimes asked to explain the discrepancy; but the irreligious horologist, not being appointed for life, was obliged to be at once more civil and more scientific, and boldly declared that he kept his clock five minutes ahead of the church to allow for the difference of longitude. We—some of us—may not have been altogether satisfied with the reason, but we permitted both directors to keep what time they liked, and good-naturedly made the necessary allowance in our appointments. Now St. Oscars has an illuminated dial, with punctuality laid on from the railway station. I am certain that I should not know the place again.

It was during my residence at St. Oscars that I made the acquaintance of a little girl, whose subsequent history has since been, by a singular series of accidents, constantly brought before me. It seems convenient, for the better understanding her story, that I should here tell, as briefly as I can, some circumstances which did not come to my knowledge for several years later.

Margaret Spencer was the child of an officer in the service of the East India Company. Her father, born shortly before the beginning of the century, had joined his regiment in time to witness the last defeat of Holkar, and had borne part in the subsequent war with the Burmese. Where so much heroism was manifested whenever the English soldier was permitted to close with his enemy, it might have been forgiven to Armandale Spencer that he did not seek the difficult work of distinguishing himself amid such men as the victors of Rangoon. Despatches did not mention him, but private letters from brother officers occasionally did, though not in language one would

altogether desire to register in one's family annals. Assuredly not in such letters as find their way from the tent to the newspaper—those words fresh from the battle-field—words which the proud father, with a swelling heart, vainly strives to read aloud in his husky and choking voice to girls who listen with eager eyes and heightened colour—while the mother stifles her sobs and prays, silently. Nevertheless, Indian officers, writing home to masculine friends, had a good deal to say about Armandale Spencer.

First came the story of his marriage, and the unhesitating comments, made by gentlemen who had no time to select their language, upon the foolishness of Captain Spencer, up to that period supposed to be a thorough man of the world, not to say as wary a hand as ever took care, at a card party, to sit down sober and rise up a winner. This accomplished Captain, armed at all points, had surrendered to a girl of eighteen, who had been imported to Calcutta by a benevolent relative, and whose culpable inanity her doll-beauty could not redeem. Captain Spencer, then about four-and-thirty, met, wooed, and married Miss Featherleigh, and the officers who wrote home scoffed when they mentioned the match. There was matter for scoff, indeed—but they did not know why it was so.

In due time Mrs. Captain Spencer, *née* Featherleigh, presented her husband with a daughter—presented, however, by the means of a brief note written by a doctor, and carried by a black postman. The father was certainly not in waiting to receive his newly-robed first-born from the patronizing nurse, and to lay it upon the bosom of the pale and happy mother. Spencer was up the country, and on some mysterious errand, which made it difficult to trace him, and Margaret was six weeks old before her father heard that a daughter was born to him. When he did hear it, moreover, he exhibited no particular thankfulness, and as he happened to be smoking, in company with a native gentleman of opulence, the Captain lit his next cheroot with the doctor's note.

The officers continued to write (according to their natures) either flippant or severe things about Captain Spencer, and his society was not so much coveted by his friends as that of an agreeable man of the world, with an exceedingly pretty young wife, usually appears to be. Curious stories came afloat, and kept afloat, and Spencer did not seem to be at any pains to sink them. Among them were odd rumours as to the way in which he made his money. For he did make a great deal of money, and remitted it to London through his agents—facts which no man can keep secret where Orientals are about him. Now, we know what a captain can earn in his military vocation, and how much he is likely to be able to remit in eight or ten years to his brother, a merchant in London. Armandale Spencer remitted about twelve thousand pounds.

His brother, the merchant in London, was his senior by fifteen years. This fact was a great misfortune for Armandale Spencer; not that he lost any inheritance thereby, for the father of the two brothers (little Margaret's grandfather) had dissipated his property, in the most gentlemanlike manner, in pursuits largely in esteem at the period of the Regency, and had departed this life as much mourned



as is usual when the deceased have made such efforts to deserve the tears of their posterity. But the seniority had caused Armandale Spencer to repose entire belief in his brother Robert, and though faith in anything or anybody was by no means Captain Spencer's weakness, he had never conquered his childish reverence for his elder relation. The case would probably have been different had the brothers lived nearer, and Spencer's acquired knowledge of the world had shown him how far superior he was to Robert in what the world calls wisdom. It was a pity that Armandale's only characteristic in the least deserving of respect should have led him into a course sadly opposed to the interests of his little daughter.

When Margaret was about four years old, two events of great importance to her took place. Her mamma ran away with a gentleman in the Company's Civil Service, and the little girl herself was remitted to England, to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Spencer, the elder brother and his wife.

The officers, in writing home, did not express any surprise that Mrs. Spencer had eloped, but some of them were a little astonished that a civilian should have carried her off, and others that a civilian, whose intellectual qualifications were supposed to be somewhat high, could have seen anything in so foolish a piece of prettiness. Everybody agreed that it was a good thing for the child that she had a rich uncle and aunt to receive her at home, and then the subject dropped—for Lord Auckland came out, and gave the Europeans several other things to talk about. I have for the present little more to tell of two persons of whom I have hitherto been able to tell nothing good—I mean Margaret's parents.

The ayah who had charge of little Margaret on her way home (as she was taught to call it) had given her Eastern imagination some licence, in depicting, for the comfort and happiness of her child, the luxurious household into which she was to be received. Her papa's lordly brother, a great man, and his noble wife, a lovely woman, would be waiting on the shore in a beautiful carriage, to welcome Margaret and her nurse, and take them away to a splendid house, where the plates would be of gold and the chairs of silver, and where she would pass her days like a little queen, lying on soft cushions, hearing lovely music, and playing with toys which would be new every day. A disappointment was in store for the young lady. The long voyage was over, the vessel was safe in the dock (the Southampton Railway was then uninvented), and the ayah and her charge were uncared for. The other voyagers, eager for English homes, had departed, one by one, or in groups, and none without a kind word and kiss for the pretty little girl whose high spirits and gentleness had won all their hearts on the way. At such a time the most considerate traveller is restless and anxious to be about his own business, but several passengers had tarried to offer a home to the little girl until her relatives could be sent for, and great indignation was expressed at the neglect with which the latter had behaved. The ship had been telegraphed long before, and Mr. Spencer, as a merchant, must have been aware of it, or ought to have been. Lady M'Cullombich (who had gone out

much as poor Mrs. Armandale Spencer had done, and had married nearly as soon, but by the help of good principles and high cheek-bones had escaped any such peril as the other lady had undergone, and had come back to prepare a home for her rich old Scotch husband)—this worthy and defiant woman all but carried off Margaret by force, and would have done it, but for the gallant resistance of the Hindoo body-guard. The ayah, whom Margaret insisted upon calling Boosey, because that was the name of a bearer in a treasured story-book by Mrs. Sherwood—and Margaret did not in the least care about its being a man's name,—had by dint of repeating her imaginative sketch of the prospect in store for her young lady brought herself to believe in it. The faithful Boosey, therefore, insisted on sticking to the ship.

"Well, when the captain turns you over the side, and you haven't got a home to go to, Maggie, make Boosey take a coach, and drive to a house in Russell-square that's all covered with scaffold poles. Russell-square, mind—but I'll tell somebody with a better memory."

And the excellent woman bustled away to leave her orders, and then returning, and giving Margaret a robust kiss, bustled away to her coach.

Still the nurse and her child remained, and no one came to receive them. They were permitted to stay on board until long after the last passenger had left, and the unlading had commenced, and yet no messenger from the house of gold plates and silver chairs. The ayah was shocked, and saddened, and sometimes infuriate. But Margaret was too much amused with all that she saw, and with the new world into which she had come, to feel her position very acutely. During the day she rushed about the vessel, enjoying the confusion which had succeeded to the order and regularity of the voyage, and at night she said her prayers, crawled into her bed, and was fondled to sleep by her affectionate nurse, who little thought she was doing wrong in hushing her Christian child with a song chanted at heathen festivals in honour of the Goddess of Flowers. But the poor ayah was to make speedy atonement for her impiety.

On the third day from the departure of the kindhearted Lady M'Cullombich, there was a disembarkation which greatly interested Margaret. This was the landing from the vessel of a tiger of considerable size and much beauty. He had been imported by an enthusiastic Fellow of the Zoological Society, who designed a worthy present to his associate beast-fanciers. He, more mindful of his expected guest than the Spencers had been of theirs, hurried up from the north as soon as the ship was telegraphed, and hastened to the docks to welcome his growling bargain. Mr. Mungle (he has since twice changed his name, and each time, I am happy to say, for an estate, so he will hardly be recognised) came on board to superintend the transfer of his property from the ship to the van. Margaret and the delighted old gentleman were friends in a minute.

"So you have seen my tiger, young lady, and you like him?"

"No, I do not like him much, but I hope he is going to have a good home."

"A capital one. You must ask your papa and mamma to let you come and see him."

"Ah! they are in India, but I will ask my uncle and aunt."

"And what are their names, my love? I will send them word when Mr. Tiger will be at home to you."

"The same name as mine."

"But you have not told me that."

"My name is Margaret Spencer—but my uncle and aunt are not called Margaret, you know, but Mr. and Mrs. Robert Spencer."

"Eh," said the old gentleman, rather sharply. "Where do they live?"

"I don't know," replied Margaret, "but Boosey knows."

"And who is Boosey?"

"That is," said the child, pointing to the ayah, who was watching the tiger's cage, as it was forced along the deck. She was watching it, and its occupant, with no friendly eye—the native, and especially the native woman, regards the beast of the jungle as an enemy to whom no quarter should be given, and Boosey was intolerant of the system of making a pet of such a prisoner.

"A fine tiger," said Mr. Mungle, crossing to where she stood.

"A fine devil," returned the Hindoo, in a low voice. "Shoot him, and burn his head."

"You cruel woman," exclaimed the indignant Mr. Mungle. "I don't believe that you are fit to be entrusted with the care of a child."

"What Miss Maggie think?" said the ayah, looking affectionately at her charge, who, in reply, clasped one dark hand fondly in two little white ones.

"Well," said Mr. Mungle, who could not help being appeased by this loving demonstration, "but you ought to love all God's creatures, and not talk of destroying them."

"Much love for tiger—locking him up in a small cage," said the nurse. "He is thankful."

"Ah!" said the naturalist, "but you don't understand, my good woman. We wish to admire the wonderful works of Providence, and—steady there!" he exclaimed, as the men who were bringing the cage on let it strike rather violently against the bulwark. He was, perhaps, not altogether sorry at finding an excuse for not finishing the argument.

"Devil well out of the ship," muttered the ayah.

"But see, how splendid his eyes are, Boosey," said Margaret.

"And there was a growl for you! Is not he in a rage with the men for carrying him about?" And she ran forward, in perfect fearlessness, to obtain a better view of the savage. His furious stare fell on her, and the ayah rushed up to drag her out of the influence of what the Hindoo believed to be an evil eye. Boosey had drawn back Margaret a few paces, when one of the rollers on which the cage was moved slipped from its place, the cage received another violent shock, and the next moment there was a wild cry among the men as they retreated in terror. The woodwork had partially given way, and the tiger's paws were forcing an opening.

The maddened ayah saw, or fancied she saw, that the savage's eyes were still fixed on her child, and it was with a cry scarcely less wild than the yell with which the beast, the next instant, writhed himself into freedom, that she clutched Margaret, and thrust her to the head of the cabin stairs. The tiger made his bound at the same instant, and had the ayah been an English servant, with all the same devotion, she could not have interposed in time to save the fair little head. But her earnest love inspired a singular effort, and the lithe frame of the Hindoo seemed to curl, as it were, around the body of the child, and the brute's paw descended as he passed. Another moment, and the Englishmen found their hearts, and with what weapons they could snatch, rushed with one fierce shout at the animal, who, appalled at their charge, sprang over the side of the vessel.

They raised the two forms that had fallen on the deck, and Margaret, though terrified to a ghastly pallor, was found unhurt. But the ayah lay senseless, and severely wounded by the terrible stroke, apparently so effortless.

"God forgive me," said the naturalist, "for the words I used to her. We must remove her instantly to the nearest hospital."

Amid their own fear, the men had seen and comprehended the bravery of her deed, and they lifted her tenderly and admiringly. A sort of litter was hastily extemporised, and poor Boosey was conveyed to a neighbouring institution for the treatment of accidents. Margaret would have followed, but the naturalist took her hand.

"You shall come with me, my darling, and to-morrow we will see after the friends who seem to have forgotten you. At present I won't ask you a word about them."

And he took away the child, promising to send for her luggage. They reached his comfortable villa, in the Regent's Park, and from his wife Margaret received a mother's kindness.

This was her welcome to England; but it was not for some days that the discovery was made why no friends had met her. It involved another discovery of a far graver kind. A few weeks earlier Robert Spencer had become a bankrupt. And in the business which he had ruined the money entrusted to him by his brother Armandale had been invested. Margaret Spencer had not a shilling in the world.

That the interesting little girl should be adopted by the benevolent and childless couple under whose protection she had thus curiously been thrown, would be the natural course of a story. But, happily for Margaret, this destiny was not hers. A better training was in store for her than that which she would have received as the spoiled child of the home in the Regent's Park. The Spencers had a sister, who, when quite young, had married almost as young a country surgeon, and the match had been so displeasing to the vain and sanguine merchant, Robert, that he had not only dropped all intercourse with his sister, but had represented the marriage in so unfavourable a light to his brother in India, that Armandale followed his example, and Mrs. Captain Spencer was not even aware that she had a sister-in-law. That relative, however, came forward in the hour of trouble, and while Robert Spencer was hiding from his creditors, or fudging medical certificates that he was suffering from such diseases that his appearance



*The Squab and her Charge.*

London: Richard B. Ford, 1890.



to attend to his own affairs would inevitably slay him, his bewildered wife, though not an unkindly person, was easily induced to recognise Mrs. Cheriton's relationship, and to concede to her the charge of the little Indian girl. The Cheritons were settled at St. Oscars, and thither, after a short sojourn with her first friends (who were far more reluctant to give her up than her aunt had been), Margaret was taken, to be received as one of the children of the Cheriton household.

Poor Boosey suffered much from her wounds, and more from a sense, which almost distracted the faithful pagan, that she was abandoning a solemn trust in leaving her charge in the hands of others. It was difficult for the authorities in the hospital to prevail upon her to submit to the treatment necessary to her restoration, and it was only after a visit from Margaret and her aunt that Boosey acquired any kind of self-command and patience. The assurance of the child that she was being well cared for and happy, and the gentle voice and manner of Mrs. Cheriton, did much towards assuaging the remorse of Boosey, whose last thought would have been the recollection that it was her own self-devotion that had laid her on the hospital couch. Mrs. Cheriton's promise was given that, as soon as the ayah had been completely restored to health, she should rejoin her young mistress, and thenceforth Boosey endured the confinement with more resolution. But it was a glad day for her when Mr. Mungle, who regarded himself as the proximate cause of her misfortune, came to remove her, and to arrange for her journey. His liberality, and that of his wife, were lavishly exhibited in Boosey's favour, and there was no compensation for her sufferings which he would not have been prepared to make, except one, which the Hindoo pressed upon him with an affectionate earnestness that greatly discomposed him. The tiger had speedily been re-captured, and had been installed in a den in the Gardens; and Boosey incessantly prayed to Mr. Mungle that he would take a gun there, shoot the animal, and burn his head. This proposition the excellent Fellow was obliged to resist, but Boosey had no other reason to complain that he did not make ample atonement for the disasters of which his taste had been the cause.

When I have said that Lady M'Cullombich was in due time written to, and informed that the little girl to whom she had shown her rough and ready kindness was in safe hands, as much of Margaret's history as connects itself with her voyage has been told. That voyage may be regarded as having had a fortunate termination, for though all the golden dreams with which the Indian had amused her child had been harshly dissipated, I hope to show that the realities among which she soon found herself united to give her a better and a happier home than that which Armandale Spencer had destined for her. The little Margaret was adopted into a religious family—a family of that kind, not so rare as cynics are good enough to allege, but still quite rare enough, where religion is not simply kept for use on Sundays from 10.45 A.M. to 1.10 P.M. It was so good an article that the Cheritons were not afraid of wearing it out by using it on work-days—but, on second thoughts, this statement seems to belong to a new chapter

## CHAPTER II.

## THE MANAGER'S FETE.

THE season was at its height when the manager of the Opera-house issued the invitations for a *fête* at his beautiful villa on the bank of the river. As there was not the slightest reason in the financial state of his treasury to justify his making this demonstration, and as he was about to resign the management of the establishment, the most ill-natured people (and there were a great many among his guests) could assign no better reason for his hospitality than his own good nature. It was mortifying to be reduced to admit this; but sometimes one finds people doing kind things out of sheer kind-heartedness, and perhaps there would be more of such things done if more credit were given for those which we behold.

The day was fine enough to please a Frenchman, and the smoothly-kept lawn, studded with geraniums, and gently sloping to a terrace that overlooked the river (the thoughtful manager had secured a high tide for his afternoon), was gay with the summer fashions. Round the door of a small tent, guarded by a gigantic grenadier in oriental costume, there crowded a group of ladies eager to enter, for within was a fortune-teller, who spoke French only, and had whispered a few wonderful hints, proving his strange knowledge of secrets, to some who had already consulted him. The choicest band, culled from the Opera-house orchestra, was performing exquisitely, at such a distance as permitted one to listen to the music or to one's companion, at will. The most accomplished conjuror in the world, with his lean face, dark eyes, and hook nose, was walking about in Mephistophiles costume, biding his time to astonish into ecstasies, with a few ordinary feats, those who would have looked on languidly while he performed his most wonderful achievements at a theatre. From the lawn dainty bridges were laid to the windows of the villa, and a luxurious *déjeuner* was incessantly renewed within, for this attention was by no means overlooked by the assembly. And so in and out of the house, and around the tent, and along the terrace, and across the turf, and upon the garden seats, and against the trees, there glided, and lounged, and leaned, and gossiped, and censured, and flirted, a very well-selected party, most of them in good humour with the day, with the *fête*, with the host, and with themselves.

Besides the distinguished nobodies, there were some somebodies at the *fête*, somebodies political, artistic, commercial, literary, theatrical. There was a Minister, who was pouring out so much nonsense to a gay group of ladies, that when one found that he had been able to give the Commons some more, late in the evening, one marvelled at his fertility of resource. There were several members of Parliament, chiefly amateur soldiers, with one or two elderly senators who, though in no way ornamental, were, as victims of the ballet, encouraged by the manager, always thoughtful for his dependents. A few beautifully-jewelled Hebrews were also about the grounds—wherever music is the goddess,



you find Israel at the shrine, either worshipping or taking the offerings. There were some splendid capitalists, whom we all looked at with profound veneration: the most gentlemanly *millionaire* of them all has since been transported, and another is in white terror of a similar destiny, but we should look with equal veneration on the others, were we honoured with cards to meet them next week. Moreover, several authors might have been beheld in the flesh—and a good deal of it—walking among those groves, meditating noble thoughts, yet not averse to feminine prattle and the lighter wines. An English composer or so had been asked, and came, and perhaps scowled a little, when passed by a smiling foreigner, who could not for his ears (no trifling venture) have written such harmonies as the Britons indite, but, nevertheless, had managed to have four operas produced, and condemned, in rapid succession. Again, there were three or four of the half-dozen actors who are strong enough in their own art to respect another, and can hear the word opera mentioned without sneering. I saw a clergyman, too, with neat lavender gloves, and thought him out of place, but ceased to think so when I observed him listening very tolerantly to an exceedingly full-flavoured anecdote told by the little doctor of the theatre; but, perhaps, I do the priest wrong, for the doctor narrated in French, and the other may not have understood him. There were also some critics (the name is eschewed now-a-days, and rightly, when there is so little to bear real criticism, and nobody to be swayed by it, charm it never so wisely), and it was touching to see how the opera-artists came up to them with enthusiastic reverence, and showed gratitude for the advice and reproof which these gentlemen could have written—had they liked. Finally, there was a dining-out wit, who garnered a great harvest that day by listening—contrary to his usual custom—to other people's stories, and who, I am sorry to hear, has since lost his *prestige*, through the fatal habit of putting greater names into his anecdotes of personal experience than is quite safe in a man who parades a Bristol diamond and a Birmingham H.

In the course of the afternoon a new amusement was arranged by the manager, whose theatrical experience had taught him not to allow people much time to consider whether they were enjoying themselves or not. A target was placed at one end of the lawn, and a set of the most ladylike bows that ever were seen was borne around, by the well-drilled servants, for the inspection of the guests. The ever-courteous manager advanced, and addressed a few bland words of invitation to the ladies to exhibit the skill which he was certain they possessed, adding that, though of course he could not entertain the presumptuous idea of offering prizes to his visitors, he had ventured to hope that any fair Diana (he was a well-educated mau, and, besides, had brought out sundry mythological ballets) who should honour him by shooting at his target, would do him the further honour to accept a trifling *bijou* in memory of the favour she had accorded him. The speech was irresistible, and was re-enforced by the appearance of a salver covered with crimson velvet, on which was displayed a collection of the prettiest trinkets the Palais-Royal could furnish. An archery band was instantly enlisted, the fair volunteers being of a class too good for the display of underbred affectation, and under the direction

of a celebrated bowyer, as graceful a group of pretty archers as ever aimed at targets or lovers was speedily placed at due shooting distance. Some were prettily awkward with the weapon, some as prettily dexterous, and the scene was pronounced a decided success by the admiring spectators.

One girl after another had discharged her arrow, and smilingly received compliment or consolation, when it came to the turn of a young lady of singular beauty to try her fortune. She seemed under the care of a rather handsome, but rather over-extensive and over-dressed lady, who had manifested a little impatience for her *protégée's* opportunity to arrive, and had of course caused some little amusement to the imperturbable dandies around. But she might be excused for her desire to bring forward a charge so attractive as the girl whom she urged onward to the shooting-place, and whom, though few seemed to know her, many looked very anxious to know. Rather tall, but with so exquisitely-developed a figure that her height was not conspicuous, and with features whose special characteristic you disregarded in the remarkable sweetness of expression which they wore, the new candidate for archery honours elicited that murmur of inquiry which implies extreme approbation on the part of those around. And the next step of her patroness, though anything but correct or proper, was received with no disfavour. She insisted, and the reluctant girl's opposition was utterly in vain, that the latter should remove her bonnet, without which the elder lady was sure that the younger would shoot better. And imperiously carrying her point, she detached the article, and a beautifully formed head, set in a profusion of rich dark curls, was made manifest for the further subjugation of the spectators. The action caused a flush to rise to cheek and forehead, and for a moment the well cut lip showed a displeasure instantaneously subdued. We had more leisure to note that the lovely archer's countenance was of a Grecian type, but not too regular for a certain playfulness; that she had violet eyes with long lashes; and when she smiled, which she presently did, and did as if smiling were a habit with her, she disclosed exceedingly beautiful teeth. We also noticed, as the leathern thimbles and gauntlets were being adjusted to her hands, that they were small, and appeared to be soft; and it was equally impossible not to observe that her arms were finely rounded. If people do not want to undergo this kind of inspection, they must stay at home; but nobody ought to stay at home who can bear such scrutiny so well as could Margaret Spencer.

The bow was raised, and drawn, and the arrow struck the target fairly and well. Some of the other girls had made better shots, but none of them were applauded as was Miss Spencer. And of all who applauded, no one was so enthusiastic as a tall young fellow, very good looking, and very well dressed, who had been imagining himself bound to feel rather bored with the afternoon's business, but whose superstitions in that way had been suddenly put to the rout by the appearance of Margaret. He immediately became the natural and enthusiastic personage which at five-and-twenty any youngster with health and spirits ought to be, and he pushed forward, watched the

shot, and applauded it with as much intensity as he had ever displayed at cricket in the playing-fields at Eton when one of the other side was splendidly caught out. He began to hate the smiling manager, as he thanked Miss Spencer and led her to her friend, and he looked so wildly eager to get himself presented to Margaret, that the other dandies, a second time, were so fortunate as to be amused.

The young gentleman, however, recked little of their smiles, and speedily succeeded in hearing the magic words which had so great an influence on the rest of the life of both himself and the young lady.

"Mr. Arundel. Miss Spencer."

How delighted he was. And what a world of things he had to say to her about the *fête*, and the people, and the season, and everything else. For his admiration, of course, was only at the point at which one is desirous to make as favourable an impression on the admired object as the latter has made upon oneself. At this point there is no intensity of feeling to disable you from successful attempt to please, and still further is it removed from that triumphant condition of things where passion gives eloquence, and instead of undermining, you blow the gate open, and march gloriously into the citadel.

Now, later in the day there departed from the *fête*, and took their way to the club, two young men. One of these was Mr. Philip Arundel; the other was a friend, who was a joint occupant with him of chambers in King's Bench Walk, in the Temple. They were, therefore, close intimates—read one another's love-letters, humbugged one another's duns, borrowed one another's pipes and paletôts, and "when one tall fellow had money it was not for the other tall fellow to lack it." The second man was named Claxton, and he was pretending to be a barrister until a wealthy uncle should leave him a good deal of property. And on their way to London they talked in this wise.

"I thought the old lady would have offered to set you down, Philip. It wouldn't have been much out of her way."

"How do you know what her way is?" demanded Mr. Arundel.

"I know everything."

"You always say you do; but your preternatural wisdom got us into a hole about the Oaks, for instance, my dear Jack."

"A mere accident," returned Mr. Claxton, quietly, "and your mentioning it so often shows how little you can bring against me. But tell us—has Mrs. Spencer asked you to the house?"

"Well, no—that is, I think she meant it. But she doesn't seem exactly to know what to say to people."

"I take it that during her eclipse she has been consorting with rather a different set, and has come back a little awkward."

"What do you mean by eclipse?"

"I thought you knew all about her. I am sure you talked to that girl long enough to have heard the history of all her family since the ark."

"Only that was just what we were not talking about, Jack Claxton."

"Sensible little girl to shy the subject," replied Claxton, lighting a cigar.

"She is not little, and she did not shy the subject. But one doesn't cross-examine a girl about her relations, at least not that sort of girl, who speaks for herself."

"All very fine; but I must protect you, as usual, from the snares of the world. That Mrs. Spencer is, as you don't seem to know, the wife of old Bob Spencer, who went wrong some years ago, under circumstances of a piscatorial character."

"What do you mean?"

"Highly fishy they were. Something about breach of trust, and the embezzling his brother's money—a man in India. However, he went to the bad, and nobody heard of him for a long while, which was regretted, I believe. It was before our time, you know; but Ackford, and Wrottleby, and some others, used to dine with old Spencer, and say his dinners were rather clumsy, but his wines first-rate. If that woman had anything to do with the dinners, one can see what a mull they must have been."

"Never mind her—get on."

"Well, the old bankrupt has turned up again, whether with his creditors' permission, or how, I don't hear. They may not think him worth persecuting. But he must have got some means, because they live in Gower-street, and they give parties now and then; and besides, they've taken this girl to live with them."

"She has been living in the country for years."

"Yes, with another aunt, who brought her up, and who has not done the wisest thing in the world in handing her over to Mrs. Bob to bring out."

"You can't bring a girl out in a country town."

"Granted; but what need to do it at all? Why didn't she stop down at—wherever it was—and marry the curate or the doctor? She'll do no good under the shadow of that old disreputable bankrupt, who robbed her father; and I can't make out how she comes to be upon any sort of terms with his family."

"Her being so, my dear Jack, makes me think that you have got up the case with your accustomed inaccuracy. But isn't she an angelic party?"

"Very nice, indeed, and with a steadier manner than one could have expected in a girl brought up as she has been."

"How's that? She is very well informed, I can tell you that, and talks most charmingly."

"Listens, you mean, for you gave her no chance of talking. But what I mean is, that her country aunt is married to a doctor of some kind, and they are dissenters, or schismatics, as that ass Octagon Spandril would say. I suppose she is a dissenter herself."

"I suppose she is particularly glad to get out of that sort of thing, and perhaps that is why she came to Mrs. Spencer rather than remain in the country."

"Very likely," said Mr. Claxton, "which shows the frivolous and ungrateful nature of woman. This is very good tobacco, Philip."

"Give me one. It shows nothing of the kind; but it is very natural at her time of life, and with her good looks, that she should want to come into the world."

"Well, it's no business of mine, and not much of yours, I take it, Philip."

"I don't know that."

"By Jove!" remarked his friend.

"I swear I never saw anything like her," said Philip Arundel, emphatically.

"Champagne."

"I haven't had a drop."

"Well, of course you will not make an idiot of yourself?" said Mr. Claxton, in that sort of imperative tone in which we demand a promise from any one whom we much regard, and would save from misfortune.

"I can't say. She is A 1. In fact, the ayewunnest girl I ever saw."

"I know what will happen," said Jack Claxton, disconsolately. "You'll get into that house, and that old woman will learn that your governor has plenty of tin, and they'll ask you to suppers, and then it will be all up."

"Well," replied Mr. Arundel, not so terrified as he ought to have been, "then you'll have the chambers to yourself, and you can pursue your cooking experiments without interruption. You'll come out a perfect Francatelli."

"Don't exhibit levity, Philip Arundel, when I am reproving you and warning you. I say, my dear fellow, you must keep out of this nonsense."

"I tell you what, Jack, she is a deuced deal too good for me," said the other, earnestly.

"Quite so, in every sense, and therefore you let her alone. Now, I promised your governor to give an eye to your goings on, Phil, and you can't say that I ever pestered you with advice. But this is past joking."

"He would like me to settle," said Arundel. "I have heard him say so."

"Ay, but his notion of settling is not a bit like a match with the dissenting niece of a disreputable bankrupt—a girl without a shilling. You know that better than I do, and it's no use talking bosh."

"Well, there's no harm done yet," said Arundel.

"Yes, there is, and you are just in the humour to do more. However, when we come back from the cruise, we'll talk about it again."

"Cruise? Oh, I shall back out of that. I'm going to write to Topham, and say so. I'm not going to be shut up in a yacht with him for a fortnight; and besides, I don't think the sea agrees with me."

"This is a worse symptom than any," said Claxton. "This morning you were buying red shirts for the cruise."

"I'll sell them to you at cost price."

"Very sad, very sad," muttered Claxton. "Let us catch that Hansom."

Pylades, Pythias, Nisus, or any other devoted friend, heathen or Christian, could not have said more to his friend, had they lived in the present day. Perhaps, in the eagerness of his affectionate zeal to save his companion from a beautiful and amiable girl, Mr. Claxton, had he been inspired by the old classic virtue, should have married

her himself—but to this flight of self-devotion he was unequal. But he did his best for Arundel, alternately dilating upon the scampishness of Robert Spencer and the vulgarity of his wife, and drawing pathetic pictures of the horror of introducing such people to the fastidiously honourable elder Arundel, and to Philip's elegant sisters. The young men dined together, and Jack pursued the subject with so much pertinacity, that it was somewhat surprising that Philip, whose temper was good, but not perfect, did not check him, and the fact that he did not ought to have excited additional fears in the mind of his monitor. Mr. Arundel received in extreme good humour all that was said by his friend, evaded any further contest, and even admitted that a foolish match was an unwise thing.

But the next day he went to the manager, with whom he was a favourite, and easily induced him to send an opera-box to Mrs. Robert Spencer. And that worthy lady had not had so many opera-boxes of late that she even thought of transferring the present, and therefore, next night, two ladies appeared in box No. 80, and these, very soon afterwards, were joined by a handsome young gentleman, who had been impatiently watching that box through his great black double glass for a long time, and hastened up to it with exceeding speed, and actually without waiting for the end of the first act. But Mrs. Robert Spencer did not express any displeasure, and if her beautiful companion felt any, it was very carefully concealed. The result was as the far-sighted Mr. Claxton had predicted—Mr. Arundel *did* get into that house in Gower-street.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE CHERITONS AT HOME.

OF the years which elapsed between the deliverance of Margaret Spencer from the tiger and her appearance at the Thames bank *fête*, a sort of account has been given by Mr. John Claxton, but there is a little that may be advantageously added to the frank narrative of that gentleman. This is desirable, not only because some of the personages whom he referred to will be again heard of, but also because it is well that we should be able to trace the influence of the early training received by Margaret.

Adopted into the family at St. Oscars, the little girl took her place as the youngest of the household.

Henry Cheriton, her aunt's husband, was a compound of manly energy with almost feminine kindness. Slight in frame, his powers of endurance were remarkable, even tested by the severe standard of a country doctor's work. He had preserved what is seldom long left in the constant presence of misery, an earnest sympathy for the affliction with which he had to deal, but that sympathy, though it might thicken his voice, and even bring a dimness to his eye, when he related to his wife or friend some scene of pain and sorrow that he

had witnessed, never touched eye, hand, or heart in the moment of duty, never shook that composed firmness with which he discharged his task. His success was great, though in the sphere to which he had confined himself (and which he was often vainly invited to exchange for a larger and more appreciated practice), his profits were by no means commensurate with the benefits his skill conferred. He was idolized by the poor, and against them he never had reason to bring the railing accusation, which nevertheless may be often founded in justice, that they love to impose needless trouble on the medical man. They did not summon him from his bed to a bleak and stormy ride, unless there were reason for the call, and those who, following in the track of the good doctor, visited the cottages, heard no spiteful tales against him, no thankless narratives of his treatment. His skill could be but partially recognised by this class, but they could understand his never-varying kindness, his respect for their households, for themselves, and even for their prejudices and superstitions. In a time of panic and epidemic, when it was necessary to rouse them to personal exertions for health and cleanliness, no appeal of mayor, clergyman, or landlord was so efficacious as that of Mr. Cheriton. A poisonous ditch, against which abuse, protests, speeches had been made for years in vain, was diverted and brought into communication with a rushing watercourse, by the humble people who lived near it, within two days from five minutes' address by Henry Cheriton upon the cruelty of leaving such a pest near the homes of the little children; and it is due to the mayor and clergyman of St. Oscars to add, that in a time when sectarians were far more dreadful and dreaded beings than now, the dissenting doctor was publicly thanked by both.

A more cheerful, fearless, kindly man never existed. For the oppressed, Henry Cheriton always stood forward as champion; but, a gentleman by birth and bearing, his advocacy never took an offensive attitude, and he never triumphed in its success. It was less an interference between patron and dependent, landlord and tenant, master and servant, than the removal of a misunderstanding, and an endeavour to convince each that the other had unrecognised good qualities. Many things that he did were said to be quite out of his line as a medical man, and some of the smaller attorneys in his neighbourhood especially said so; but such complaints passed Mr. Cheriton as the idle wind. He once remarked, when told of such animadversions—

“My profession is a larger one than some people seem to understand. It includes a general practice, for which I have a licence given from Jerusalem. I am sorry folks cannot read it; but I can, and I know my tether.”

Cheerful, and also, we have said, fearless, not only in presence of his legitimate foes, plague, pestilence, and fever, but in face of physical enemies. For there was a time when disturbances broke out in the mining districts of more than one county adjoining that in which St. Oscars stands, and rough and grim men collected by the thousand at the sound of horns, heard raving sermons by torchlight, and then marched into the towns and flooded them with violence and tumult. Rumours came that such a visit was to be paid to St. Oscars, and the

magistracy, collecting what force they could of yeomanry and constables, went out to meet the rioters. With the authorities, rode Mr. Cheriton, and they took possession of a bridge upon the road, along which the enemy was to come. They came in great force, armed with clubs and missiles, and upon perceiving the small array of their opponents, uttered a yell of derision, and opened a galling shower of stones. The Riot Act was read in dumb show, and the lawful men were thrown into confusion by the lawless ones, and would speedily have fled, when Mr. Cheriton spurred forward on a white horse, well known at many a home where its master had halted to do good, and riding into the ranks of the assailants, seized the leader.

On the high ridge of the bridge the whole crowd could see the slight figure of the doctor, who held his man in a determined grip. Many of them knew him. Others were daunted by the daring of the act, and there was no more stoning. He then addressed them, and in a short energetic speech pointed out the folly and wickedness of their acts, and warned them that, while the gentlemen of the district were earnest in their desire to assist the working men through their grievances, no intimidation would be borne with. There was something of Cheriton's wonted kindness in the address, and before it was well ended the man he had captured asked leave to speak, and mounting the parapet, motioned to the mob to retreat. They obeyed.

Have we sketched Mr. Cheriton sufficiently? If so, there needs the fewer words about his wife—for what sort of a wife would such a man choose? When he married Eleanor Spencer he was scarcely of age, and she was eighteen. We have mentioned how unacceptable to her brothers was the marriage. It, however, rendered her a happy woman for life. She found in the husband of her affection, not only the household stay, the affectionate friend, but one whose love was ever active to form a somewhat neglected mind, and to temper a somewhat too impetuous disposition. On the other hand, the unvarying cheerfulness which marked the doctor in maturer life was in large measure due to the never crushed, never despondent spirit of his wife. He, always in earnest and conscientious, had in his earlier days incurred the peril of discontent, of something as near cynicism as such a nature could permit. He was discouraged, daily seeing how much misery there is in the world, how many close their eyes to it, or apply quack remedies, while the most zealous can do but little for its diminution. These thoughts at one time recurred too often, but Nelly Cheriton's influence drove them away. There was too much sunshine about her for dark thoughts to abide. And thus the two, in perfect confidence, love, and trust, aided one another along the path of life. Nor were Mrs. Cheriton's attractions entirely mental. She was very pretty when, a slight girl, she gave her pretty hand to the young doctor; but as she developed into womanhood she became prettier still. Her gentleness increased, but it did away with none of her playful good humour; and when children came around her, there was not a merrier laugh in the nursery than that of the mother. There were three children who had their hearts gladdened by that laugh. Two boys came, and if it be lawful to use the word in reference to a ceremonial without godfathers or a godmother, silver mug,



fork, or spoon (the spiritual destitution among the Dissenters is very sad), were christened respectively Alban and Latimer—Mr. Cheriton's favourite reading lying in the martyrology. The little girl, who next came to enrich the household's treasury, was named Bertha, in commemoration of an early Christian queen. Alban Cheriton was, when Margaret joined the circle, a delicate, thoughtful, broad-browed boy, whom his parents, much as they rejoiced in his manifest intellect, would in their private hearts have rather seen in or over more hedges and ditches, and less often over books and maps. He was six years older than his cousin. No complaint of over-study could be brought against his junior by two years, the bishop's namesake, who was as bluff, rosy, mischievous, and warm-hearted a lad as ever made a mother proud and anxious. But the character of each youth, particularly that of the elder, was modified before Margaret left them. Bertha Cheriton was a happy, pleasant-faced child, lacking her mother's beauty, but inheriting much of her disposition. And all three cousins at once conspired to pet the little Indian.

The kind of education which Margaret was likely to receive in such a household needs little detail. Mrs. Cheriton, with occasional aid and direction from her husband, taught the children while they were young, and the boys were in due course subjected to a sterner discipline, while a governess took up the work with Bertha and Margaret. For a boarding school for girls Mr. Cheriton entertained a dislike almost amounting to disgust—it is possible that this feeling may have had rise in some of his professional experiences, but he was reserved upon the subject. He was, however, a man of too large a mind to wish to withhold from his children occupations of a pleasant or refining character, merely because, in the absence of self-command, they might be made of too much importance. Some of his more rigid brethren condemned him for permitting his children to learn music and dancing; but he smiled at some of his more rigid brethren, and the lessons went on. To his wife, however, he said—

"Nero fiddled over burning Rome. I look to you, Nelly, to make Alban understand that a deep love even of Mendelssohn does not comprise all the virtues. And though you need not set the case of the daughter of Herodias before Bertha and Maggie, as poor, shallow, good old Rigby did before me the other day, as an argument for stopping the poor children's dances, I know that you, love, will make them see why a carpet quadrille to-night does not mean an assembly-room ball to-morrow."

So, under the guidance of affection and good sense, the training of the children advanced, and years advanced too. The first of the group to complete his education was Latimer Cheriton, who, having set his heart upon law, somewhat to his father's wonderment, was allowed to choose his vocation, and was articled to one of the worthiest members of the profession. Bertha and Margaret, being nearly of an age, emerged at the same time from their books and lessons. But Alban, who was educated for his father's calling, and destined to take his business, required a longer preparation; and it was decided that after he had walked the hospitals, he should see some London practice before settling at St. Oscars. There were good reasons for this

arrangement; but, could the elder Cheriton have foreseen some of its results, he would not have proposed it to his son.

Increasing in beauty year by year, Margaret became the idol of more hearts than one in our quiet country town. To some extent, the wall of partition which divides the church party from the dissenters in societies of no great magnitude, and which is strengthened by the circumstance that in political struggles the two classes are usually ranged on opposite sides, prevented much access, on the part of our Eligibles, to the family circle of Mr. Cheriton. This wall, however, had been a good deal breached by a few of our enterprising young Tories and churchmen, who were deeply penetrated by the charms of Miss Spencer, and it was not very much defended by the Cheritons. Still, the dissenting doctor could not gather at his table the cream of our cream. Of the young gentlemen to whom the town maidens chiefly looked up as prizes worth the winning, Margaret had the refusal. Eustace Galtimore, son of the leading Conservative solicitor, whose practice was very lucrative, and who was thought to be able to return anybody for the Parliamentary division of the county in which St. Oscars stood, formally proposed, with the paternal consent. Young Galtimore had black whiskers, dressed with much splendour, receiving his garments from London, wore many jewels, talked loudly and fluently, had just enough reputation as a *roué* to make him fascinating, rode a good horse well to hounds, and was the envy and admiration of every young lady below the aristocracy of our neighbourhood. Him did Margaret Spencer refuse, and her reasons were perfectly satisfactory to her uncle and aunt, and, I suppose, to herself, though a step she subsequently took renders it possible to doubt this. Two or three serious young men, who were preparing for the schismatic ministry, avowed their desire for such a helpmate; but ordinary worldly prudence would have rendered their repulse matter of duty, even if their flabby coats and large round ears had not made it equally so. Margaret had several other opportunities of marrying, but as she evaded them all, there is no need to set them down. One man, perhaps, might have succeeded—a fire-eyed enthusiastic man, who had convinced himself that missionary work was his mission, and had instantly thrown up a profitable and prosperous calling, and was fiercely wringing out the secrets of three Oriental languages, preparatory to sailing for the East, to set up the standard of his faith. He visited St. Oscars, and was Cheriton's guest; and Margaret's young spirit kindled in presence of his chivalry; but even while holding her hand and gazing in her animated and beautiful countenance, as he described the battle-fields that awaited him, he never thought of her save as a listener whom it behoved him to interest in the work of his master. He went—his zeal was not unrewarded—and he sleeps the sleep of Henry Martyn.

But there was one heart that beat for Margaret with a passion nothing akin to the admiration of the smart young Galtimores or the serious young Mubbles. And this, as will easily have been surmised, was the heart of her cousin Alban. In boyhood studious and thoughtful; in youth still thoughtful, and not without a sensibility and a poetical temperament not much to be encouraged, and certainly not to

be stimulated at that period of life, Alban, as he grew to manhood, acquired a deeper and a sterner nature. There had been nothing of effeminacy about him at the time when his carelessness for the ordinary amusements of boyhood caused regret to his parents, and as he advanced in life it was soon seen that his frame had strengthened, that his powers of enduring fatigue were great, and that his resolution was dauntless. What his disposition would ultimately be it was difficult to foresee. Reserved, and calm almost as a statue in presence of the common disturbing causes or the quarrels of school or of his native town, he would sometimes evince a domineering tendency which surprised his companions, and before which they gave way. But usually, the broad and lofty brow was unruffled, the pale but severely handsome features were in repose, and the deep voice was almost judicial in its gravity. Far from popular among the herd of his fellows, Alban Cheriton was earnestly beloved by some two or three who had found the key of his nature. Into his profession he threw himself with strong purpose and will, and speedily distinguished himself where competition was possible. A prosperous career was evidently before him.

Alban's love for his lovely cousin was in no degree based upon the boyish feelings of association, or upon the accident of her having been the first object of his attentions. We all know that the tendency of very young cousins to love other young cousins of the opposite sex is almost as natural as the tendency of the same relations, when of more mature years, to hate cousins of their own gender. This child-love had no place in Alban's bosom. He liked the pretty little Indian when she arrived, and was always courteous and kind to her; but when his rattling and daring brother Latimer used to declare her his wife, and lead her away to imaginary homes in the garden, Alban never beat him and took away his bride, or sulked at her flirtation, as a really smitten boy would have done. It was on his final return from school, at which his mind had been much improved by the usual scholastic pursuits, and his fancy had also been largely fed by studies of the poets—our own and those of modern Italy—that having formed an ideal of feminine beauty, grace, and graciousness, he suddenly, and to his surprise, found it realized in the girl whom he had regarded as a pleasant child-sister. It was then that he began to watch over her with other eyes—then that his jealous vigilance would have prevented, if he could, all access to her. Yet he proudly owned to himself, and even in his love did himself this justice, that if Margaret could listen to any of the suitors St. Oscars could furnish, she was not the deity that should hallow the temple of a heart like his. He scoffed at the showy, noisy Galtimore, and scarcely deigned to regard him as a rival; and Alban's composed bearing towards the studious yet ignorant serious young men, with the great round ears, was unexceptionable. The pang that went to his heart was sent by the missionary-crusader, in whose deep and determined nature Alban recognised something akin to his own, and therefore something which he believed ought to triumph with Margaret. It was with almost torture that he watched her drinking in the enthusiastic utterances of the man about to doom himself to exile, poverty, and suffering

for the victory of the faith, and it was with a gasping sensation of relief that the young man marked the departure of the other. Those who have loved—but, happily, the ocean washes away most sand-marks—let us rather say those who are now loving, can tell one another how Alban sought to sound the heart of Margaret, to discover whether the crusader had left his image there, whether, though he and the young girl would meet no more, a second place in the heart was all that was left to him who might win her hand. He sounded, and to his unutterable joy found, or believed that he had found, that she had but admired one good, brave man, and that another might still aspire to a prouder reward.

His father doubtless saw the course of his son's affection, but held his peace. He wished—as a father only can wish—his son's happiness, and he waited events. His mother, who wished—as a mother only can wish—her son's happiness in the way her son desired it, said no word of what she saw, but redoubled her affectionate efforts not only to render Margaret still more worthy of Alban—a mother's thought—but to make the girl feel that there was but one home where she could be so loved and cherished.

And Margaret herself?

Margaret must speak for herself when the time arrives.

And here I must not omit to add that the faithful pagan, who had perilled her life for her little girl, was, on her recovery, received at St. Oscars by Mrs. Cheriton, with the cordiality the nurse's devotion had deserved. But a difficulty speedily arose. Boosey was eager to resume the charge of Margaret, but her aunt thought that this was most undesirable. Margaret was no longer the heiress, and therefore must be educated into habits of self-dependence, and at all events weaned from the indulgences of Indian life. She would share with Bertha all the affectionate care of Mrs. Cheriton, but the continuing a special lady's-maid for the little lady seemed to the aunt an unkindness and an injustice. So, after one trying scene, in which the firmness of Mr. Cheriton himself had to be called in aid of his wife's resolution, Boosey resigned her office, and was lodged, in much comfort, in a small house in the town. She refused to return to India, though Mr. Mungle repeatedly offered to send her home in the best ship in the Indian fleet, and she constituted herself a sort of sentinel where she could not be a nurse. In the house in which she lived she was not entirely without occupation, having to defend the faith of Brahma, Veeshnoo, and Seeva against the incessant endeavours of the Particular-Baptist stonemason, of whom mention has been made, to convert the pleasant-looking pagan from the ways of heathendom. She was perfectly successful, and not the less so from a habit of emptying a large brazen dish of water into the face of her antagonist when he grew profane. But she was very good-natured, and would often atone to the sculptor, who was particular about eating as well as about christening by cooking him some strange-coloured Oriental dish, which usually elicited from the old man a quiet scriptural quotation, to the effect that whatever is set before a Christian he ought to eat, asking no questions—a point of religion a good deal forgotten by gentlemen who escape from cold mutton to the club dinner, and very likely find fault with that.

## CHAPTER IV.

## STRUGGLES AND CHANGES.

DURING the interval which has been described in the preceding chapter, the communications between the aunt to whom Margaret had been remitted by her father, and the aunt who had relieved Mrs. Spencer of a charge which her circumstances rendered unacceptable, had been very scant. Mr. Cheriton deemed it his duty to obtain, as early as possible, the assent of Margaret's father to her remaining at St. Oscars, and with that intention he wrote, first through Mrs. Spencer, and receiving no reply, to Captain Spencer himself. It is probable that the first letter was never forwarded, for the relations between Spencer and his brother at the time of the bankruptcy were not likely to be so amicable as to encourage correspondence. But the second letter was received, and acknowledged in the briefest manner. Captain Spencer was obliged by Mr. Cheriton's attention, and while waiting explanations of circumstances which he could not at present comprehend, would feel thankful to Mr. Cheriton to permit the arrangement as to the child to remain as it was. In this letter were enclosed bills for fifty pounds, which Mr. Cheriton placed in a bank in little Margaret's name, and never touched again. Thenceforth, the only intercourse between the families was confined to an occasional scrambling letter from Mrs. Spencer, full of enthusiastic expressions of love for Margaret, and of gratitude to those who were taking charge of her.

Margaret had been eighteen for some months, when one morning (our letters had then begun to arrive in the morning, instead of at mid-day), during the family devotions, never missed in Mr. Cheriton's household, the kneeling group was startled by a petition introduced by "the priest, the father, and the husband," into his ordinary prayer for protection and support throughout the day. It was asked that if any painful duty, even to the cutting off the right hand or plucking out the right eye, were appointed to be done, by those then before their Maker, they might be mercifully sustained in its discharge. And the voice of the speaker, usually so calm, was broken, and the remainder of his prayer was indistinct.

The meal that followed was a silent one. All felt that Mr. Cheriton had something to communicate, but each member of that family, with all its affection, had acquired far too much self-command to ask for a premature explanation of what would be told in the father's good time. It was evident, however, to the children, from the agitated manner of their mother, usually so watchful and attentive to forestal all their wants, that her husband had found time to confide the secret to her. They lingered, but not receiving an invitation to remain, Latimer withdrew to his office, and Bertha to some cottagers' children whom she received every morning. Alban, whose residence was in London, and was therefore regarded as a visitor, remained, when his father asked him to see a few poor patients, whose troubles Mr.

Cheriton usually found time to hear before taking the business of the day. The young man went out, and Margaret was about to retire to her own room, when her uncle requested her to remain.

"My darling Maggie," he said, looking affectionately towards her, "I have just received a letter, which materially affects your future welfare."

Margaret was a girl, and a beautiful one, and may be pardoned if her instinctive thought was that somebody else had become aware of the fact. Her face was still cheerful as she looked up for information as to the supposed offer.

"I will read the letter, my dear. I have told your aunt of its purport. It is from another aunt, of whom, perhaps, we do not think so often as she imagines we ought to do."

"Mrs. Spencer?"

"Yes. Once her letters amused me a little, if one ought to be amused at folly, but the folly has a sadder interest now. She says—

"MY DEAR SIR,—At last 'the hour has come and the man,' as Sir Walter says. I am now able to relieve you of a task which 'must have been a joyful labour to you, but still it is one.' Will you announce to my beloved Margaret that her Aunt Spencer is ready to take her away from her rustic retirement, and to receive her among the busy hum of men, where I hope her conquests will be as numerous as her attractions. We have got a first-rate house in Gower-street, the best house in the street, and the situation is the best in the metropolis, being alike removed from the grubs of the east and the butterflies of the west; in fact, like Mahomet's coffin, 'twixt heaven and earth. The sooner dearest Margaretta (as I mean to call her, though a rose by any other name would smell as sweet), can come to her aunt—who finds she is not thought so old by the *beaux* as she thought herself, and who has got a capital milliner—the better. How this consummation devoutly to be wished is to be managed, I hardly know; but as railways have annihilated both time and space, I suppose that you will be her escort to London, and I hope that you will honour my poor house with your presence for as many days or weeks as your patients can spare their guide, philosopher, and friend. My kindest love to your admirable wife, and to your charming little flock, and believe me,

"Yours most impatiently,

"Tuesday."

"HENRIETTA SPENCER."

Mr. Cheriton read this letter with gravity, but not without a certain compassionate contempt for its tone. Margaret listened at first with a deep attention, but as her uncle proceeded through the foolish epistle, a smile beamed out on her face, and she was surprised to see that at the end he looked up sadly.

"Well, uncle dear, that is soon answered," she said. "Will you do it, as Aunt Spencer writes to you?"

"And what am I to say, Maggie."

"Well, really, uncle, if you and aunt are not tired of me—"

"Stop, dear one," he said. "I ought to have told you all before allowing you to speak. Indeed, there is an enclosure which I should

have read to you instead of that unwise letter. This, dear Margaret, is from one to whom you must listen in another spirit."

"DEAR SIR,—It is my wish and desire that henceforth my brother and my sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Spencer, of London, should take charge of my daughter Margaret, now resident with you.

"This being merely a business letter, I postpone addressing to you and to your family the acknowledgments due for your protection and care of Miss Spencer; but I will add, that I have directed arrangements to be made for reimbursing you all expenses which you may have incurred on her behalf.

"I am, dear Sir, your obedient servant,

"ARMANDALE SPENCER."

"Calcutta, January 1."

"From my father," said Margaret, faintly.

Her aunt rose and went to her, and placed an arm round her waist. "From your father, dear Margaret. And before you express a wish, or even a feeling on the subject, remember that he is your father, and that you owe him duty."

"The letters have come upon me so suddenly," said poor Margaret. "This morning we were making plans for my next birthday, and now——"

And she broke into crying.

Mrs. Cheriton allowed her this relief for a few moments, and then drawing her closely to her own side, sought a few motherly words with which to console her.

"At least there is no hurry, dear girl. Come, come. You will have plenty of time to make your decision."

"My decision," sobbed Margaret, looking up with streaming eyes. "Oh, if you say I have a decision——"

"No," said Mr. Cheriton. "Margaret's conscience has told her rightly. There is no decision for her, only obedience. But there is no hurry, as you have said, dear Nell, and Maggie knows by this time, or never will, that our sorrow at parting with her will be as great as her own."

"I cannot, I must not, I ought not," exclaimed Margaret. "I have neither father nor mother, except yourselves, and you have been the best and the kindest in the world. Why am I to be taken away from a home where I am so—so happy, and sent to live with somebody who——. Well, you, uncle, with all your goodness, cannot read her very letter with patience."

"My child, if duty were easy and pleasant, how gladly we should do it. Being a trial, it is still more bounden upon us to do it without repining. Shall we say no more about this for—what—a week. I will make a proper answer to this lady, and you will have time to learn to regard the separation as we must all seek strength to do."

"Yes, a week," said Margaret, "a fortnight. I have been with you for fifteen years, and I am sure a fortnight is not too long for me to reconcile myself to a change. No," she added, again breaking out in tears, "I cannot leave you, and I will not."

"It is for you, Nelly, to bring her to a right view of this trouble," said Mr. Cheriton; and taking his niece in his arms, and kissing her affectionately, he left the room.

Then there arose a great conflict in the mother's breast. Any mother who reads these lines will know

What angels, in their crystal armour, fought  
A doubtful battle with her tempted thoughts.

She knew Alban's secret, and we know how she had worked for his happiness. Now, at this moment, with Margaret's heart full of the home and the hearts she was asked to desert—now, if her thoughts took the direction the mother desired, perhaps believed they might be taking, as Margaret sobbed in her arms—now, if an understanding that Alban's love was returned would make the departure unnecessary! And so two beings, one of whom she idolized beyond all on earth, save her husband, and the other of whom she so loved as to deem her worthy of Alban, would be made happy.

I suppose that forty-nine women out of fifty would have said the few words necessary to turn the current into the right direction, and are, perhaps, calling Mrs. Cheriton a scrupulous fool.

Of course, if Alban and Margaret were engaged, with the approbation of his parents, and of those who had hitherto been her guardians, it was for Alban to say where she should live, even if an immediate marriage did not take place; and why should it not? Then, a few lines to the foolish woman in Gower-street, to say that long-neglected duty had been resumed too late, and that Miss Spencer had taken her destiny into her own keeping, or, rather, had confided it to one every way worthy of the trust.

Remember, too, that the loving aunt who then held the beautiful girl in her arms, had done the very thing herself; had set at nought the counsels and threats of her worldly relatives; had, still under age, wedded the man of her love, and had been rewarded with years of the most unbroken happiness.

Nevertheless, and with all these thoughts of the past and for the future upon her, Eleanor Cheriton was sustained in her resolve to show herself worthy of her lofty-minded husband. Would he, she asked herself for a moment—but it was needless—she felt that his brow would have flushed hot at the thought of a manoeuvre. And she did her duty.

In a few moments the two women were on their knees together.

Mr. Cheriton, after a short interval of consideration, had joined his son in the surgery, and when the last of the humble patients had been permitted to work out her rigmarole of a recital that had nothing to do with her affliction, and had gone away wholesomely believing that her cure was certain, because she had made the doctor completely understand her case, he quietly informed Alban of the purport of the letters that day received.

The young surgeon was at that moment delicately adding from one bottle to the contents of another. It was curiously characteristic of him that he carefully completed his work, and then dashed to the



ground the vessel he had been so accurately filling. His father did not give any sign that he noticed the violence.

"Margaret is to go to London," said Alban, in a voice that trembled.

"Is there anything so dreadful in going to London?" said his father, calmly. "It is not a usual terror with young ladies of your cousin's age and appearance. She is invited to the house of a relative who lives in the gay world, as they call it—and the gay world usually makes itself pleasant enough to handsome girls of eighteen."

Alban looked hard at his father, whose tone was just then one in which he indulged but rarely.

"Yes, that is true," said the young man, after a pause. He then remained silent. The father's heart was swelling with a hope that Alban, in the fulness of his own, would speak out to him, and ask his counsel.

But Alban remained silent—took up a bone—laid it down again with much precision—righted a few books and papers, and gazed through the window of the surgery. His father gazed wistfully at him, and then a horse's tramp was heard, and Mr. Cheriton went out and mounted. As he passed the window, Alban was still standing there, and made no acknowledgment of his father's parting nod.

Now it may be that Alban Cheriton knew his own business better than his father—I mean his business in this love affair. For, most assuredly had he opened his heart in the way Mr. Cheriton yearned to witness, and had confided his love, and the fact that he had never declared it to his cousin, he would have received the most high-minded of counsel, and indeed of command. Mr. Cheriton was prepared to say to him—

"Had you been engaged, your course might properly have been different from what it now must be, namely, to be silent until your cousin is under the roof of her new guardian. Then you may address her, and ask the consent of her father. But new obligations are now imposed, and no advantage must be taken of the natural readiness to listen in time of affliction."

Possibly, this was precisely what Alban Cheriton did not want said to him at this moment, and therefore he would say nothing to bring it forth, but allowed his father to go away with a sorrowing heart, that having invited his child's confidence, it had been withheld. But had the father a right to expect that at twenty-four his son would court the interdiction meditated. Let us be reasonable, even though we are fathers.

What did happen was simply this:—

His father was hardly at the end of the town when Alban rushed up-stairs to the breakfast-room. He found the door locked, and he knew what that meant, and retired. He hastened down to the kitchen in which his sister, having heard her little class, was busily superintending the distribution of bowls of bread and milk.

"Hester can see to that, can't she? I want to speak to you in the garden, Bertha."

"Yes to be sure, child. Come along. Lucy Johnson, don't eat so

fast. I expect to see some in your bowl when I come back, mind that. That bowl's for you, Charlotte, and mind you don't fall into it. Now then, Alban." And the light-hearted girl, who had half forgotten the warning of that morning, took his arm, and was going out trippingly, when she looked up at him.

"Oh, Alban, how pale you are. You must be ill."

"No, no. I am well, but come out into the air. Have they told you?"

"Told me. What?"

"About Margaret."

"No, Alban. What—what about Margaret?—quick."

"Her father has sent from India, appointing her a new guardian—Mrs. Spencer—and she is to go and live in London."

Bertha did not look so utterly distressed at this intelligence as her brother had, perhaps, expected, and she did not speak for a few moments. When she did, it was to make anything but the answer he looked for.

"Perhaps it is as well. At least for a time. But then you are going to London too."

"You speak as if her going would be well, were it not for mine. What do you mean, Bertha?"

"Don't speak crossly to me, please, Alban. You never do, and so it seems the more strange."

"I did not mean it, dear; but tell me what you mean?" he said, in some agitation.

"It would—her going would—will you be angry with me for saying it?"

"Only speak."

"It would perhaps prevent a mistake from going too far."

"What mistake?"

"Alban, I know that you are fond of Margaret—no, we all are that, but you are more."

"You mean that I love her?"

"Yes, yes," said the girl, now sharing his agitation.

"And her going would prevent—what?"

"You will hate me—no, you cannot do that. I wish I had not said what I did; but now—"

"Bertha, speak out," said he, sternly.

"Margaret does not love you?"

"She has told you this?"

"Do you think for an instant that I would say what I know must grieve you, Alban, if I did not know that it was true?"

"She is quite right," he said, much more quickly than Bertha expected. "Why should she love me, you know? I have never given her any reason to love me. All is as it should be. Bertha, you will forget that we have had these few words. Be sure you do. I rely upon your forgetting it."

He walked away quickly, but steadily, returned to the surgery, locked the door, and sat down. There had been much of agony, mental and physical, undergone in that chamber. But, perhaps, no unfortunate creature who had groaned there, had endured more than

this strong heart was struggling with. There was a damp upon the high pale forehead that could have told its own story, had there been a witness. The set teeth, and the clenched hands, and the dim eye betokened that a proud nature had received a sudden blow, and was quivering under it, and vainly opposing physical resistance to the effects of a moral shock. He would recover—completely recover—but he must have time.

The door was tried—found fastened—and a retreating step was heard.

It was his mother, who knew that the tidings had been conveyed to him, and who had come with a hope in her heart. There could be no betrothal at St. Oscars; but both the young people were going to London, Alban could visit the house in Gower Street, and the rest would surely be easy for him. Had she found him inclined to open his heart to her, this encouragement of course she might give him. But he had chosen to be alone.

I know not whether she thought that he was engaged as she had been, and took that comfort to her motherly heart. But if so, deeply was she deceived. Alban was seated, fiercely contending with his own excitement, and though abstaining from the reckless vulgarities of blasphemy in which worldlings sometimes give utterances to their deepest wrath, he was conjuring up, with the rapidity of a prompt imagination, every form of rival that could come between himself and his cousin. And upon each ideal the tortured lover was concentrating a hatred that could be assuaged by no vengeance which it were well to name here.

In a month everybody in our town knew that the day was fixed for Margaret's departure. The only person in St. Oscars who felt pride and pleasure at the news that Miss Spencer was going to London was the faithful Boosey, who had become a feature in the place, and who never ceased to proclaim that her young lady was the heiress of countless treasures, won by the terrible sword of her father, and would one day regain her rights. To learn that the very relatives who ought to have received her, years before, on her landing in England had at last sent to reclaim her, caused the liveliest joy in the bosom of the patient and affectionate Hindoo; and though her delight met no response from those to whom she imparted it, no chillness of reception could prevent her exulting, and breaking out in snatches of her pagan hymns. For it should be mentioned that every attempt to convert Boosey to a decently white, or even whitey-brown creed had signally failed. The Particular-Baptist had for years assured her of her predestined damnation, and gentler and wiser Christians had sought to bring her with tenderness into the fold; but the kind-hearted heathen was impenetrable, and all the home missionaries had given her up. I am not sure, indeed, that as provincialists, we were not in our hearts a little vain of possessing the only professed heathen in the county. She was certainly more than tolerated, and was very popular; and I remember that a ribald boy, who, uninspired by awe for Oriental traditions, once presumed to perform a nigger dance behind her, with appropriate song, as Boosey,

carrying her vegetables, went down our principal street, was seized by our respected beadle, and at once flogged with a severity which was applauded by the whole of St. Oscars. The ex-ayah would have liked to accompany Margaret to London, but Mr. Cheriton, who had gained much influence over Boosey, persuaded her that she would probably injure her young mistress's interests by so doing, an intimation which rooted her to the spot.

The day after that on which Alban had heard from his sister the words so fatal to his hopes, he left St. Oscars for Chester, on pretext of visiting a relative, and did not return to his native town, but ultimately proceeded to London to undertake his medical duties. It is not necessary, at this time, to trace the effect produced upon his character by the shock he had received. But it should be said that it was part of that character to accept, in an instant, the full truth, without going through the process by which ordinary minds gradually reconcile themselves to it. It belonged to Alban's proud and sensitive nature to bear his sentence, and without cavil or contest to lay his head to the block. His instinct told him that Bertha, who loved and almost worshipped him, knew all, and had revealed all, and there was an end of his dream.

Far be it from the present writer to uphold any such sensibility. It has not fallen within his experience to discover that it leads in any remarkable degree to the promotion of man's success either with men or with women—and we live to succeed. Life is one long warning against trying to cut our way with a polished razor-blade when a coarse chopper would do the work. When Hannibal split up the Alps to make a road for his soldiers, he used no delicate and subtle acid, but the strongest smelling pickle-vinegar he could steal.

For aught I am authorized to say, Alban may have thrown away his own chances. I know what, under similar circumstances, the smart, confident, black-whiskered, young Mr. Galtimore would have done. Had *his* sister told him not to make an offer because the young lady he admired did not love him, he would have given a facetious imitation of the late Mr. O. Smith, and have said, "Then she bust learn to love be;" and, at all events, he would have had an interview. For this he would have prepared himself, and very properly (for you cannot take too much trouble to please), by dressing himself to the best advantage, using his most delicate perfume, and studying several love-phrases and touching turns of expression from the pages of some tender novelist. He would have pleaded his own cause with perfect self-possession, and would have been impetuous and pressing at the right moment. And if he were rejected—as in Margaret's case, this particular sample of a forward young man had been served—at least he would have had the satisfaction of knowing that it was not his own fault, but the girl's infernal bad taste, or some prior affair that had stood in his way. I do not know that in the average of cases such a gentleman would be rejected; and if he begged to be allowed to let time prove him worthy of the inestimable treasure, I suppose that the inestimable treasure would have granted him time—and then, with patience and perseverance, and watching the turn of the market, he might have finally gone in and won. Who knows?

At all events, he would not have taken a sister's assurance that he had no hope, and thereupon walked away and suffered in silence. But so did Alban.

I trust that we are all too high bred to like mysteries and small secrets. I am anxious to have as few as possible in this story. And I declare at once, Bertha was perfectly right in stating to her brother that Margaret did not love him. Her feelings towards him were of earnest respect, and of gratitude for kindness and for instruction. To say that she was a little afraid of him, would, perhaps, be to say too much, but in any long conversation with him she preferred that other people should join her. She knew his learning, his skill, his high principle; and she had somewhat, even with her inexperience, detected the romance that lurked behind his lofty and composed pride. But all this (to which, as a young lady, she was not likely to forget to add his physical advantages) did not constitute what, unknown to herself, Margaret Spencer was looking for. It is possible that she may have been aware of his love for her, but I affirm that their intimacy, from childhood, made it also possible that she was not, and the matter is not at present of importance. If she were aware of it, I do not think that any one will blame her for having taken care that her good little cousin Bertha should be informed of the state of the case.

The day was fixed for Margaret's journey, and then, on the evening before, came a hastily-put-up parcel, containing a hastily-scribbled letter from her aunt Spencer, who begged that her coming might be delayed for three or four days, on account of Mr. Spencer having white-washers in the house. The three or four days became a fortnight before Mrs. Spencer wrote to ask for her niece's presence, and having long since confused the particular excuse she made to Margaret, among other excuses which she had had to lavish among various persons, she expressed her satisfaction that the family with the hooping-cough had all gone away from the ground-floor, and her darling Margaret might come with perfect safety to a home which should always be home, though it were never so homely.

"The woman said she had the best house in Gower-street, Nelly," remarked Mr. Cheriton, privately, to his wife, as they stood before the fire late one night. "This looks like lodgings, and a scramble."

"I fear dear Maggie is going into a fool's paradise," replied Mrs. Cheriton.

"Not the slightest doubt about the fool, but a good deal about the paradise," he rejoined.

"All may be for the best, Henry. Something may happen to give her back to us. Poor dear Alban!"

"He is either acting a very foolish part or a very brave and wise one," said Mr. Cheriton, "and I think that you and I are not likely to doubt which it is, Nell."

Mrs. Cheriton looked up to a portrait of Alban, taken a few years earlier (and perhaps wearing, in its gentle expression of untried power, a look dearer to the mother than a later picture would have given), and her eyes became dimmer as she laid her soft hand on her husband's.

"He will be worthy of his father," she said.

"Like his father," said her husband, "he owes all the good in him to you. But," he added, "I wish that he had laid his plans before us, instead of starting away as he did."

"Surely, dear Henry, he told us all his plans. He goes direct to his new partner's, and takes the business for two years, and then comes back to lighten your labours, and make us happy for the rest of our lives."

"I almost hoped that we were happy already."

"So we are, dear, very happy, and I hope very thankful. But you know what I mean."

"Of course, dear. I wish I knew as well what the boy means."

"However, he goes to London," continued Mr. Cheriton, "and I have no fear lest any disturbing cause should prevent his doing his duty. I suppose, however, that he will soon avail himself of the privilege of cousinhood to call on Margaret, and introduce himself to Mrs. Spencer, and I dare say he will be well received."

"I should think he *would*," said the mother.

"But it may not be so. The Spencers may wish to sever the connexion between Maggie and ourselves, or your brother may have given them orders to do so; and in that case Alban may make up his mind to have the Gower-street door shut in his face."

"What, Henry, after Margaret has lived with us for so many years! I know that my brothers have not given you any right to think well of them, but let me think a little better than that. Why, it would be the blackest ingratitude."

"Nay, dear, what are they to be grateful for? Do not you remember that I am to make out my bill for Maggie's board and lodging, and that it is to be settled? After that is done, what obligation is there to us?"

"Don't, Henry. I love all that you say; but, do you know, I love the least what you say ironically. Let us believe that they will behave as we wish them to do. Years have gone over their heads, as over ours, and may have taught them lessons. You will see poor Robert, Henry, when you take Margaret there, and, I don't say for his own sake but for mine, you will be kind to him."

"Am I generally so very unkind to people, Nelly?"

A sob and an embrace, and the husband was answered.

## CHAPTER V.

## A LONDON HOME.

IF it be true, as hath been held by many philosophers (chiefly in the school where scholars have rubbed their elbows through their coats) that one proves the nobility of one's friendship by one's willingness to accept a friend's assistance at need, there was no reason for Mr. Cheriton's apprehension that he would be coldly received in Gower-street. On driving up to the house whence Mrs. Spencer dated her scrambling letters, Margaret and her uncle perceived that some species of contest, apparently of an unfriendly character, was proceeding in the hall. A lady in a large dusty-looking morning-wrapper, and with some very gay flowers in an exceedingly dirty cap, was endeavouring by energetic oratory to convince an individual, unpleasantly like a tax-collector, that he was sure to be paid, and therefore that his taking summary measures, which, with the aid of a confederate, he was about to employ, was perfectly ridiculous and preposterous. But it requires a delicate mind to be convinced by argument, and an exalted nature to forego, upon conviction, your previous design; and in the inferior departments of the State her Majesty is not always served by men so gifted. The personage in question, after some ungenerous remarks upon his having had to reiterate his requests about twenty times, and having been put off with about that number of inconsistent excuses, beckoned his attendant by an upward jerk of the chin, and entered the house. Mr. Cheriton's experience among the needy part of society told him at a glance what was going on, but it was too late for retreat. Mrs. Spencer had espied him.

"Welcome, thrice welcome," she exclaimed, rushing to the cab-door, with entire disregard of the criticisms which genteel Gower-street might emit touching her garments (subjects on which Gower-street is sensitive). "You must be Mr. Cheriton; and this is darling Margaret. Come, in with you! Ann, see to the boxes."

Ann, a domestic, about whose great size and strength there could be no doubt, but about whose face it would have been premature to speak at that period of the day, as such very false lights and shades were left upon it by the duties of the morning, advanced with a good-humoured grin to remove the luggage, and Mrs. Spencer, talking volubly, led the way into her mansion.

"I did not expect you so early; but good things can never come too soon. *Bis dat qui*—what is it? though I always say *bliss dat*. But that scandalizes you gentlemen and scholars, who have no notion of a poor woman's taking liberties with Latin, eh? Of course you have not breakfasted. What, you have? Well, then, we'll call it lunch and"—

And I am sorry to say that unhappy Juliet's perfumery hypothesis came in once more—the rose by any other name.

Mrs. Spencer went into the parlour, beckoning her visitors to

follow, but drew back, somewhat disconcerted at beholding the man with whom she had previously been discussing finance, engaged with his companion in taking hostile note of a French clock on the mantel-piece, and of some ancillary biscuit-china.

"Ah!" she said, with a forced laugh, "the most absurd thing in the world, and yet so vexatious. Mr. Spencer, who has no head for business whatever—no more, I tell him, than a pin, and that carries its point, which he never does—has gone out without leaving a cheque for some payment—I don't exactly know what it is, Easter Offerings, or something—that he knew ought to have been paid long ago; and the first I hear of it is, that it must be discharged on the instant."

The collector, as has been said, was not a man of delicate mind or exalted nature, and yet he must have had some good-humour about him. Instead of confronting the speaker with a little counterstatement, to the effect that Mr. Spencer had no voice allowed him in the house, and that Mrs. Spencer knew perfectly well all about the demand, having excused its nonpayment by a series of inventions ranging from the commonplace promise for the following Tuesday up to the solemnity of having the money upstairs, but unfortunately in non-corresponding halves of a bank-note, the man quietly said that such things *were* overlooked by gentlemen with much on their minds, but that he could not wait any longer.

And a bright idea flashed upon Mrs. Spencer's mind, and she acted upon it with extreme promptitude. The result was that Mr. Cheriton inaugurated Margaret's entry into her aunt's house by paying out the tax-gatherer. Of course Mr. Spencer would give him a cheque for the amount the instant he returned home, or would pay the money anywhere Mr. Cheriton pleased in town, or would send a post-office order to St. Oscars, or in a registered letter—or, anyhow. Mrs. Spencer, relieved from her immediate trouble, manifested large acquaintance with the machinery of remittances. In the course of some years of trouble she had known what it was to wait, and occasionally to wait in vain, for one or other of these pecuniary devices.

But when the minions of the Exchequer had departed, Mrs. Spencer lost no time in having the table spread with a plentiful and luxurious breakfast. Nothing could have been better, but for small blemishes whence unfavourable inferences are drawn by hard-hearted observers. The mustard-pot was quite empty, but not quite clean; the cayenne had hardened at the bottom of the cruet, and had to be poked up with a steel pen; the plates came up cold; and a suspicious delay, and two bangs of the street door, implied that the stalwart Ann had to run out before the sugar-basin could be refilled. This was not the way Aunt Cheriton's household was administered, thought Margaret. But although Mrs. Spencer did not always pay her taxes, she either paid or had credit in Piccadilly; for a noble *paté de foie gras*, of which but one bold slice had been taken for a lunch of her own, was brought from the sideboard-closet as soon as the house had been vainly searched for the key, and the strong-handed Ann had forced open the rickety door. Mrs. Spencer meantime vanished, and returned in a great bustle, to do the honours, having intermediately thrust herself into a very much finer



dress than is usually produced at breakfast, retaining the flowery cap, for reasons of her own, not material to the story.

Aunt Spencer's eulogies of her niece's beauty, and predictions of her conquests, were very profuse, and at this period seemed to Margaret rather vulgar. Their tone was singularly unlike that of the quiet, yet lively circle which she had left; and she could not help remembering a little arch gesture and glance with which Aunt Cheriton had pretended to compliment Maggie on Mr. Galtimore's subjugation, and contrasting that demonstration with the outspoken prophecies by Aunt Spencer that the *beaux* (nothing could cure her of this word) would all be "at her feet." But we grow tolerant of those who praise us, even though their praises are distasteful, or we think so; and Margaret, on the whole, bore it very well. Besides, her uncle, so far from wishing her to feel that in leaving him and his family she had changed for the worse, had warned her that she would find herself in a novel atmosphere, and must accustom herself to it a little before complaining.

Mrs. Spencer lost no time in demanding point-blank of her beautiful niece whether she had left her heart in the country. Mr. Cheriton heard the question with mingled feelings; but Margaret's negative was given with much composure.

"So much the better, my dear," said Mrs. Spencer; "for though I dare say you would soon have learned to set a proper value on yourself, and thrown over any unhappy bumpkin by whom you might have been entrapped, still there is nothing like beginning without incumbrances, you know."

"Plenty of time before us to think of this kind of thing, Maggie," said her uncle, looking at her affectionately. "We are not nineteen yet, Aunt Spencer."

"Nineteen me no nineteens," returned that votary of the Elizabethan drama. "How old was your wife when you married her?"

"That is so many years ago that I forget," said Mr. Cheriton, who certainly had no answer to this appeal, Eleanor Spencer, as has been said, having married at eighteen.

"I'll remember it for you, then," said Aunt Cheriton. "She was a year younger than Margaret. Now, dear, I think we have disposed of the grave and gloomy guardian who wants us to wait, eh?"

"Well, Maggie, if at the mature age of nineteen you can meet with anybody like your gloomy guardian, seize him, as your aunt did, and make him as good a wife as she has done."

"Very pretty indeed," said Aunt Spencer. "I shall remember that your Grace was bountiful." A citation which might have no particular application to the subject, but which Mrs. Spencer would by no means, for so trifling a reason, reject as garnish to her conversation. Sometimes people, while they thought her worth thinking about, wondered where she had acquired these scraps of garnish, for she never read a book for three minutes. Nobody ever solved the problem, but it was thought that she might have caught some of them at the theatre, of which she was excessively fond. Fond, I say, of the theatre, not; as many ladies are, of their private box, and pleasant levée, and ice between the acts. In her poor days, when the civilized portion of the

house was denied to her, Mrs. Spencer would pay to be squeezed in the pit, and would endure to be walked over by the orange women, kicked by the restless little boys, and be stifled, crushed, and generally maltreated, rather than not go at all. Here she may have picked up some of her conversational embellishments, but how the rest came to her no one could ever say.

The interview, after the first excitement was over, began to assume a tone of constraint. The more Mr. Cheriton saw and heard of Margaret's new protectress, the less satisfied he was at his niece's being transferred to such guardianship; and he felt but little inclined to respond to Mrs. Spencer's outbreaks of levity. She, on her part, though usually most prompt to believe that she delighted and amused all who were so happy as to come into contact with her, could not help perceiving that the longer the keen-eyed country doctor remained in her house, the more would he see that she was not anxious to reveal; and therefore, when Mr. Cheriton spoke of his return to St. Oscars that night, Mrs. Spencer's efforts to dissuade him from so speedy a departure were faint. Perhaps she was not over-eager that he should meet Mr. Spencer, to whom he would naturally look for an immediate reimbursement of the morning's advance. Margaret herself was silent and thoughtful.

"I am resigning to you a treasure, Aunt Spencer," said Mr. Cheriton when about to leave, "and I am quite sure that you will discover its value."

"Well, my dear sir, we will try to gild refined gold and paint the lily, and all that; and I trust that when you next see Margarett, as I insist upon calling her, you will say that the treasure has not lost anything in my keeping."

"I trust I may," sighed Mr. Cheriton.

His affectionate farewell to Margaret—his whispered hope that she would, under all circumstances, strive to bear in mind the lessons she had learned at St. Oscars of higher duties than were recognised by the world into which she was going—his reminding her of her pledge to be Aunt Nelly's regular correspondent—these came next, and then Margaret Spencer was left to her new friends. Mr. Cheriton departed in anything but a satisfied mood, and Mrs. Spencer proceeded to induct her niece into the bedroom prepared for her. There had been some attempt at elegance in its decoration: two or three old boxes, covered with a gay chintz, looked like handsome couches, but sternly betrayed the confidence of any one who took them for what they seemed; some faded artificial flowers out of one of Mrs. Spencer's bonnets were placed in glasses; and on the walls were some extremely vile pictures—two without frames—and a moon of remarkably obtrusive presence in all. Moreover, Aunt Spencer, who had a sort of sentimental notion about religion, and knew that Margaret had come from a household where it was cultivated, had therefore set a low chair with a long straight back under a flaring coloured print of a Madonna; and this arrangement, in a corner of the room, she was pleased to indicate to Margaret as a Preejew.

Seating her ample person on the edge of the bed—for she was in the secret of the boxes—Mrs. Spencer expressed her hope that Mar-

garet would be very comfortable ; and having received an appropriate answer, in which Margaret's dutiful feelings spoke rather than any sanguine expectations, her aunt went on—

"You know, my dear—or perhaps you don't know, for I suppose that the Cheritons were not overfond of talking about us, but we must forget and forgive, as we grow older, for life is not long enough to indulge in quarrels—I was saying that you perhaps know that your Uncle Spencer has been in a peck of troubles for a good many years past. Bygones should be bygones, or I could tell you a lot of things that would surprise you ; and one of these days we'll have a long gossip about auld lang syne. All that glitters is not gold, my dear—you may take my word for that. But that's neither here nor there."

In this sentiment the bewildered Margaret was quite prepared to agree ; but her aunt, who had set herself down to talk on her own account, did not seem to care about replies.

"Well, my dear, we must take things as we find them, for we can't make our own destiny ; and to be or not to be, that is a question, but a question which we can't always answer. I only know that I have done my part, and tried to keep up the reputation of the family ; though I dare say you will hear quite the contrary from a good many people. You can't make bricks without straw."

Margaret's course of reading helped her to recollect that such a feat had been achieved in its time ; but she could form no idea what her aunt was driving at.

"Now my husband, your poor uncle, no doubt acted towards your poor father in a very unwise way ; and of course I had no notion as to what was going on, or what was going to happen."

"I am quite ignorant of the whole story, aunt," said Margaret ; "but I hope you will not distress yourself by talking about it. I am sure that no explanations can be due to me."

"Yes," said her aunt, "I can quite trace your exceedingly proper and highly-superior Aunt Eleanor in that speech ; and I perfectly understand the sort of impression which she has tried to give you. I make no doubt that your Uncle Spencer is booked as a regular swindler, and your Aunt Spencer as an extravagant, foolish woman ; but in Christian charity, of course, my dear, you are to try to forget all that, or at least to be silent about it. That is what the doctor's wife has prescribed."

The listener coloured up at this mention of her aunt, about whom, for the first time in Margaret's life, she heard an unkindly word ; but she said quietly—

"I assure you, aunt, that you quite wrong Aunt Nelly. I am sure that I never heard a syllable of accusation of any kind from her or from Uncle Henry."

"Just so. The affair was represented to you as too shocking to be talked about," persisted Mrs. Spencer. "I can imagine the pity the Cheritons must have expressed at your being transplanted from their Garden of Eden, where all is trim and virtuous, and your being set down in such a deplorable hotbed as Mr. Spencer's house."

"They were all very sorry to lose me, aunt, as I hope you will be, when it happens," said Margaret, gently. And it was impossible for

her aunt quite to resist that little appeal, accompanied by the prettiest look in the world. She extended her hand to Margaret, and held Margaret's, but would have her say out.

"When it happens, my dear, will I hope be when an elegant carriage draws up to this door to receive the happy pair and carry them away for the Loondermeal. But I suppose that at St. Oscars they comforted themselves with the belief that one of these days Mr. Spencer would be in a mess again, and that I should be glad to get rid of you."

Miss Spencer was perfectly sincere in assuring her pertinacious aunt that no such thought had ever occurred to anybody at St. Oscars; but had the inquiry been made of Mr. Cheriton, I am not quite so sure that he could have given so flat a denial. And, Mrs. Spencer, having, as she said, "had it out," professed herself pacified, kissed Margaret with vigour, and left her to transfer her dresses and other properties from her neat travelling boxes to some rickety drawers with capricious keys.

She had never before visited London, and its wonders awaited her. An extremely limited portion of these could be discerned from the windows of her bed-room, and she could not help thinking that in this respect her pretty St. Oscars room, from which she could look first over her aunt's flower-garden, then over her uncle's field, next across the fields of other "proud Salopians," until the stormy hills of Wales were visible in the horizon, had advantages not possessed by her new apartment. Happily, this was a back room, to which portion of our houses the daily increasing tyranny of the Street Cry is driving all who would preserve their reason. But the look-out was upon a damp, dark parallelogram, which it would be profaning a pleasant word to call a garden, and which had once boasted gravelled paths. These walks were utterly blackened, save where they were green and slimy. From rotting posts, on the worst of terms with the wall to which they had been nailed, but from which they were successfully trying to get away, hung snapped and mouldering cords—there had been washing there once, a long time ago—but a string from a choked dust-bin to a blighted tree bore some few efforts in that kind, the private performance of the large Ann. A big bone lay in the centre of the plot, and a half-starved cat sat looking at it, although the animal knew that weeks ago the last atom of nourishment had been gnawed off by herself and friends. Broken flower-pots, and the skeleton of an old sofa which, for entomological reasons, it had been found necessary to discard, completed the garden-scene which opened upon Margaret.

"It is shockingly dismal," she thought; "but if Aunt Nelly lived here she would send in a man with a spade and some loads of gravel, and in a week it would be another place altogether."

At this moment a stone, or something of the kind, struck the hungry cat on the side, and the scared animal, with a piteously hoarse mew, scrambled over the wall, and vanished.

"What a shame!" exclaimed Margaret. "It is well for you, you cruel thing, whoever you are, that Latimer is not here." And she recollected how her younger cousin had fallen upon a great lout of a

country-boy who was stoning a cat, and had beaten him with a fury which might be pardonable in a boy of the world, but which was thought somewhat inconsistent in a serious youth who had just volunteered as Sunday-school teacher.

A child ran out into the garden, but was so rapidly pursued by the large servant, and brought back into the house, that Margaret could only see that it was as ill-kept as the place into which it had run. She had a vision of an excessively dirty pinafore, and of some flaxen hair, extremely neglected. Of the face, in that momentary observation she could only see that it was pallid and unhealthy. The girl fancied that she heard a blow as the child was borne in and the door closed.

"The child stones the cat, and the maid beats the child," she said. "I do not think that I shall be comfortable here." But she resolved to do something for both victims, as soon as she understood the ways of the household. And so, abandoning the prospect, she went on laying collars and handkerchiefs into the drawers, which were lined with more Sunday newspapers than she had ever before seen in her life. For though Henry Cheriton knew perfectly well that the Sunday newspaper is prepared on the Saturday, whereas it is the preparation of the Monday paper that breaks up the Christian holiday for all concerned—and though he knew that to read of the world and its doings on the day of rest could not be a greater offence than to think and talk of them—still there were among his friends weak vessels who were neither logical nor chronological, but whose feebleness he respected, as became a stronger brother. Margaret, as she looked at the papers, into which she was putting prettier things than readers ever found there, remembered that upon many bonnets and shawls, and other vanities, she had heard Sunday criticisms delivered by serious folks, who would have been perfectly dismayed had it been proposed to settle the discussion by turning to the "Fashions for the Month" in a newspaper. This is a wonderful age for conjuring, but the old gnat-strainers and camel-swallowers retain their proud pre-eminence as the performers of astounding feats.

Having made her arrangements, and taking in her hand an album of cousin Bertha's—which that young lady had charged Margaret to enrich with prints, autographs, sketches, or anything that was attractive—Margaret came downstairs to the drawing-room. This was a very handsome apartment, opening with folding-doors into another nearly as large, and both were elegantly furnished. The slovenliness which pervaded the rest of the house was either not here, or was well kept out of sight. This floor was evidently the stronghold and citadel of Mrs. Spencer's social position, and Margaret was pleased. The feminine eye, no matter how young, instinctively detects the weak points in the domestic executive; and our young lady was glad to find that there appeared to be neither makeshift nor negligence in this part of her aunt's mansion.

A small desk, closed, was on the table, as were several newspapers of the day, two or three quite new books, a massive paper-cutter—like a Ghoorka knife—for dealing with them, and some other evi-

dences that what Dogberry calls the vanities—namely, reading and writing—could be practised here.

Margaret found herself alone; but not being one of the persons who find themselves bores, and must always seek companionship, she sat down, and amused herself with one of the new books on the table. And as the volume happened to be a fresh and noble poem by a poetess who is unreasonable enough to demand that those who would understand her magnificent lines shall bestow on them some little thought in exchange for the great thought that has produced them (and then the reader is but like the scrubby Diomed giving his brass arms for the golden harness of splendid Sarpedon), Margaret's earnest attention to Mrs. Browning rendered the reader unaware that another person had entered the room.

His footfall was so light that her not hearing his approach was not surprising; and he had stood for a minute or more watching her intelligent face as it expressed the pleasure she felt as rose-leaf after rose-leaf of an involved and beautiful thought unfolded and expanded to her mind. Then, as she raised her eyes, her half-formed smile changed to a look of surprise as she found herself confronted by a stranger; and she coloured highly as that look was returned by a pleasant glance and a bow, respectful and yet half playful, as the situation and the difference of age might warrant.

Before her stood a gentleman, considerably below the middle height, and in form delicate almost to fragility, but whose appearance was redeemed from aught of feebleness by a lionlike head, and features which, classically chiselled, told of a mental force and will rarely allotted. The hair, whose grey was almost whiteness, was long and luxuriant, and fell back from a noble forehead. The eye, set back under a bold, strong brow, yet in itself somewhat prominent, was in repose, but its depths were those that, under excitement, light up to a glow. About the flexible mouth there lingered a smile, too gentle to be called mocking, but evidence of a humour ready at the slightest call—and yet the lips could frame themselves for stern or passionate utterances at need. The slight stoop was at first taken by Margaret for part of the bow with which the stranger had greeted her, but she perceived that it was habitual, as the latter, resting his small white hands on the head of an ivory-handled cane, said, in a cheerful and kindly voice, and with a nod at the book—

“Fine diamonds in a fine casket there, are there not?”

His tone was evidently intended to put Margaret at her ease, and to make her forget that she had been surprised; and his manner was so pleasant, and almost fatherly, that she felt herself in the presence of some one of kindred nature to that of her uncle Cheriton. By a curious confusion of idea, to be explained only by the suddenness of the introduction, Margaret seized the notion that her other uncle was before her. I am sorry, however, for the sake of one of my best-beloved heroines, to say that neither the poetess's page nor the visitor's phrase inspired her with a cleverer answer to his speech than a hesitating—

“O—O yes, very.”

And then she naturally expected to receive her relative's greeting, but as she rose, the gentleman made a slight and courteous gesture

which seemed to beg her to sit, or do exactly what she liked, and she resumed her chair in perplexity. Her companion looked at her again with some interest, and his bright eye then fell upon Bertha's volume, which Margaret had laid on the table.

"Ah," he said, pointing to the word on the cover, "those five letters again in conspiracy against the peace of mankind. They ought to be dispersed by a social police. But may one look?"

"There is scarcely anything there," said Margaret, as he opened the book. "Only a few pages have been touched."

"Ah, I see," he said. "Just a few songsters, as the bird-catchers put some caged-birds near the nets, to persuade the others that the situation is eligible. But," he continued, turning on until he came to a drawing, "this is another kind of thing. This is capital."

It was a sketch by Margaret, and represented her Cousin Latimer, in shooting costume, and gun in hand. At his feet lay a hare, victim of his skill.

"Capital," he repeated. "Your own work?"

"Yes," said Margaret; "the likeness happened to be thought fortunate, and so ——"

"No, no, you draw charmingly. I'll give you a motto for the picture. Shall I?"

"Please. I am glad of any contribution."

He took a pen, and in a curious little hand wrote below the sketch :—

"And Beauty draws us with a single hare."

"I shall not find any poetry of yours here," he said. "You read Mrs. Browning, and so you know better. What a treasure-house of thought that woman is. Some of the boxes are locked, and you must turn the key with a will; but when you *have* opened, you are rich for life."

The interview might have lasted longer, for Margaret became greatly interested in the stranger's conversation, and was eager to hear him condescend to touch upon their relationship. But she caught her aunt's voice demanding of the servant whether she had seen anything of Miss Spencer.

"My aunt wants me," she said, expecting that this must bring about some word of self-introduction. But a courteous bow was the response; and the gentleman put his hand to the door as she went out, extremely puzzled.

"Where were you, child?" said Mrs. Spencer, on the stairs.

"I was in the drawing-room, aunt."

"Eh! O, I should have told you not to go there. Just now we have devoted that floor to a very distinguished man, who is staying with us for a few days while his house is being painted."

"Why, aunt, do you know that I have been taking him for Uncle Spencer?"

"O my prophetic soul, my uncle!" replied the inexhaustible Shakspearean. "And did he encourage the mistake, child?"

"Nothing could be more kind and polite. But what will he think of me, going into his room, reading his books, and staying talking as

quietly as if I had any business there. I actually asked him to write in an album, and I declare I have left it on the table."

"I dare say he will not be much offended, my dear. He writes books, in which he counsels all sorts of kindness and delicacy towards women; and I am told that he is one of the few men who believe in what they write."

"An author, aunt! O, who?"

"Mr. Jasper Beryl."

"And I have actually asked *him* to write in a girl's album," said Margaret, looking as if she had done something wrong. For she had read the writings of the great wit and humourist, of whom her Uncle Cheriton was an especial student, and she would, had she known him, have as soon thought of asking such a favour as one would ask Dr. Livingstone to put together a child's puzzle of Africa.

But Jasper Beryl was both amused and pleased with the interview. He had seen at once that the young lady had strayed into the room, unaware of his occupancy, and he had also seen at once that the wanderer was a beautiful and single-minded girl. The next day he went away, but before leaving he ascertained the name of his uninvited visitor. After his departure there was found in his room a packet directed to Miss Spencer, and it enclosed the volume of poetry which Margaret had taken up, and a couple of lines requesting her acceptance of the work "from a fellow-admirer."

This delighted Margaret, and she wrote to St. Oscars about it. She was less delighted at her next discovery, which was made by means of a little bill in her aunt's writing, which accidentally came to the niece's hand, and in which the distinguished stranger had been duly charged with apartments, candles, and other items of a lodging-house. Mrs. Spencer saw no further use in trying to maintain her dignity, but fairly explained that she could not bear to live in small houses, and that the only way in which she could manage to occupy large ones was by letting off a part.

"I told you so, Nelly," said Mr. Cheriton, when Margaret's next letter arrived. "I said the woman let lodgings. Poor Maggie! But I am very glad that she has seen Jasper Beryl."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SPENCERS AT HOME.

It has been intimated that had the obdurate yet considerate tax-gatherer chosen to set the real state of affairs before Mr. Cheriton, the position of the master of the house in Gower-street would have been represented as somewhat insignificant. He had, in fact, been talked into marriage by his voluble partner, and had ever since been talked down by her. While the weak Mr. Spencer had a vocation, and practised it under a different roof from that of his home, he had some little independence of action; and the result, as has been



seen, was that his feeble but sanguine disposition in the course of a few years knocked down a good business, acquired by an uncle, who dying had bequeathed it to Robert Spencer ; and further, that the latter not only contrived to ruin himself, but to get rid of the money remitted by his brother, Margaret's soldier-father.

The earth operates variously upon men who are flung down to her. For some she has the power which is illustrated in the old Greek fable, and they spring up strengthened, as Antæus, by the magnetic touch. For others, she is only a platform of mud, which clogs, clings to, and humbles for ever those who have had a tumble. Robert Spencer's case was something between the two. There was not the least chance of the broken man's ever getting himself right again ; but he would never admit, even to himself, that he had been at all to blame, or that he was in the slightest degree humiliated by his fall. Circumstances over which he had no control were, he said, his chief enemies, and next to them the hard and ungenerous nature of some whom he had supposed his friends ; and next, again, the false and hollow system of finance which was prevalent in England, and which fettered the commerce it affected to protect. At no time in Robert Spencer's life would he admit that he had done a foolish thing, or neglected a wise one, unless, if we must set down a possible exception, he may, in certain dark and private hours of dissatisfaction (as when he had been sent upstairs, into a fireless attic, and forbidden a pipe, while his wife was trying to keep up appearances in the drawing-room), have thought that it would have been better had he not met the extensive Henrietta at St. Andrew's, Holborn, one morning, as appointed. For the rest of his history! he was completely persuaded that all that he had done was in compliance with the dictates of a large mercantile and social wisdom.

Had he ever been described to Margaret, there would have been no danger of her making the mistake of imagining Mr. Beryl to be her aunt's husband. Robert Spencer was a tall, largely made, good-natured looking man, with rather handsome features, a fresh colour, and a cheery air, which went a long way towards obtaining compassion for him ; for it is a great mistake, made by a great many people, to suppose that a lachrymose method of bearing your misfortunes helps you to sympathy. We have all so much trouble of our own, that we feel angry with those who force upon us additional disagreeable images ; whereas, if a man in a peck of woes contrives to present them a little cheerfully to you, the chances are that you try to assist him out of them. When a common mendicant puts on his grievous face and sets up his whine, you look wrathfully for the policeman ; but if the same actor would try to show that he was dreadfully distressed, but kept up a good heart, he would get much copper money. Mr. Robert Spencer's cheeriness was instinctive, and it had been a valuable friend to him at times when valuable friends, or any others, were scarce. He took snuff with a bold, joyous manner, and looked at the box—silver or wood, as finances allowed—with a proud and satisfied glance, as if the powder were gold-dust, instead of two pennyworth of pounded weed.

Until his ruin, his wife exercised only what may be termed a very

strong maternal government over Mr. Spencer ; but after that event—which, it is needless to say, she had all along foreseen, all along warned him against, and could all along have prevented had he condescended to consult her ; but, no ! a wife is the last person a man will place confidence in—her authority became an unmixed despotism, not even tempered by epigrams, for poor Robert Spencer never dreamed of such treason. The Spencers disappeared after the crash. I was going to say that he gave up his books and papers ; but so compact an act of duty was entirely beyond him. He gave some, and lost others, and left others, and kept a few, utterly useless to him, as a protest against the iniquity which had overthrown him. In fact, he was as feeble in his fall as in all else. The Spencers vanished, or rather, slunk out of the way. But Mrs. Spencer had not the slightest idea of being finally extinguished. She felt that while her tongue was left to her there was hope. So Robert, by the law of the land King, abdicated, and Queen Henrietta not only reigned, but governed in his stead. “You must leave everything to me, my dear, and I’ll manage somehow,” was her coronation oath.

It would be well if all despots kept that obligation as fairly. Mrs. Spencer was a foolish woman ; but she had two or three convictions which stood her in the stead of wisdom. One was, that she must get on, no matter how awkward the scramble might be ; and, in consequence, she did get on. The estate was utterly bankrupt, and deeply involved. There was nothing for anybody. But the Spencers never sustained any actual privation. Of course they lived for a long time in obscure regions ; but they lived in comfortable lodgings, and they fared far better than many creditors who had been injured by the failure. It would not be very edifying to detail the various processes by which Mrs. Spencer contrived to keep herself and her husband afloat. There was no particular code of ethics on which her operations were based ; but she would sometimes say to Mr. Spencer, when he looked admiringly, or perhaps a little aghast at some of her moves—

“My dear, the world wouldn’t let us live with it, and so we must live by it.”

She always had a great deal of luggage ; firstly, because that looked well and inspired confidence on going into apartments ; and secondly, because she had a way of occasionally leaving boxes as a sort of security when she deferred the payment of her rent—a very ordinary arrangement in her budget. And there was no swindling in this species of deposit—the boxes were not empty, or full of stones, but they contained portions of her wardrobe ; and portions which did not look ill when a cunning landlady stole into the bedchamber to inspect the portmanteau cunningly left with the keys in it for her furtive research. But Mrs. Spencer did manage to get hold of a good deal of money. She discarded all fastidious scruples, and levied a blackmail upon those who had known her in her days of glory. She borrowed money from some, coaxed it out of others, and in short obtained it to an extent which nobody could imagine, save those who have unfortunately been acquainted with the power of a large, resolved, voluble, and not ill-looking woman.

So, always in a muddle, but never destitute, the Spencers managed

to get on for some years. Mrs. Spencer's pertinacity did not fail; and upon two or three occasions she all but succeeded in getting her husband established in some business or other—*what*, was the last thing she cared to consider, holding him equally fit for all things, which perhaps he was. But the interviews with Spencer himself settled the matter. People liked him, and his cordial and cheery manner held him up; but when they came to reflect on the ineffable nonsense he had talked about his early misfortunes, and his habit of laying his failures everywhere but on his own incapacity, they grew cautious, and declined the plans. The work had to be done over and over again. At last, however, and a short time before the business of this history commences, Mrs. Spencer hooked her fish. A wealthy merchant who had long been settled in Russia, but who, years before, had been an admirer of the already expansive but then youthful graces of Mrs. Spencer, returned to England, and having heard but little of the intermediate history of Robert Spencer, save that he had failed, remembered the friendship of other days, and assisted his old flame, not only with money, but by becoming her surety for the rent of the house in Gower-street, and the furniture thereof. Mr. Keckling would, indeed, have resided in the house as a lodger; and he did try the experiment, but the habitual scramble was too much for him. To have to ring half-a-dozen times, and finally ring up some bad toast, and then have to ring again for butter, was a rude shock to the system of a gentleman who, in his adopted country, had but to send a note to the police, and a scourging rewarded the servant who had laid the serviette on the wrong side of his master's plate. But Mr. Keckling was Mrs. Spencer's sheet-anchor, and helped her in all sorts of ways. Thus, therefore, did the Spencers emerge from obscurity into the splendour of Gower-street.

Mrs. Spencer was thus far practical. She had got her house and furniture, and had she attended to her business, she might have prospered, especially as her experience as a lodger had taught her how much that long-suffering worm will bear without turning and giving notice. But for regular business she had neither patience nor system; and the moment that a few pounds came in her way, it was much less pleasant to put them away towards the rent, or to let them go in diminution of the butcher's bill, than to have a little noisy jaunt to Brighton or Margate, spend the money, and come back to find the house in disarray, the best lodger in a fury, and the Irish servant absent for the third night without leave, and with her mistress's second-best bonnet. It was therefore the natural course of things that they should go wrong; and that they did go wrong has been slightly shown at the door of her house. It could have been shown more palpably; but if a reader can take a hint, why annoy him with a long story of petty disasters and disorders?

It occurred one day to the worthy woman, while it was really too wet to go out, and she had not, at the moment, silver enough to make a cab feasible, that she had not lately written to St. Oscars. And proceeding to repair this defect, a sudden thought struck her. This niece, who had really been confided to *her*, and whom, therefore, she was bound to look after, who had doubtless been carefully brought up

to habits of regularity and management—why should not this girl come and be her prime minister, manage the house, and leave her aunt at leisure to snatch the few enjoyments which a cold-hearted world would permit to her?

Her aunt at all events snatched the pen, and—paused. Even she, with all her thoughtless audacity, paused. For it was impossible for her quite to forget that her husband, then deeply engaged in reading a book on the currency, and making notes for its refutation (with a scheme of his own for liquidating the national debt by a stock to be based upon and representing Thames Guano), had robbed the young lady whom it was thus proposed to employ of every shilling she had in the world.

But it was not in Henrietta Spencer's nature to be long stopped by a trifle like that. She walked round and round the subject, and was rewarded, as any one will be who walks long enough round any subject, by seeing it in a new light.

More bright ideas struck her, and the letter to St. Oscars was laid aside; and some halfpence which Robert Spencer, under pressure, pleaded guilty of hoarding upstairs, were sent out to be exchanged for some foreign-post letter-paper. And this was the use to which it was applied.

“311, Gower-street, London,  
“September 9th.

“MY DEAREST BROTHER ARMANDALE,—If you feel as I do, I, your unhappy and deeply-sorrowing sister-in-law, that there is a time when bygones should be bygones, and an attempt to make compensation for error should be gently received, you will peruse this letter with the kind sentiments so worthy of you, and with the recollection of a brother once so dear to you, and to whom you are still so dear. ‘The quality of mercy is not strained, but droppeth like a gentle Jew from heaven;’ and when I tell you that, having shown these lines to my beloved husband, his tears fell upon the paper on which I write, you will give him credit for sincerity of agreement in what I am about to say.”

[This idea of the tears, by the way, was not, I regret to say, quite original, for Mrs. Spencer having sent out the sulky servant in the rain for the paper, that revengeful menial took care not to cover it up. But it did credit to the writer that the sight of the water-spots should suggest so touching a sentence.]

“I ought not to refer to what is past and gone. A poor obedient woman, I could have no share in producing the ruin and sorrow which, years ago, separated us. But deeply penitent for a fault (if it were one, and not misfortune) that was not mine, I instantly sought a shelter for the child whom you committed to me; and, as I have informed you, I selected out of many homes where my niece would have been welcome, a home in the country, where her delicate frame ‘might not beteem the breezes too roughly,’ and where her mind might be cultivated with all accomplishments. I have more than once informed you that the Cheritons at St. Oscars were doing their duty by the dear child, for amid all my ‘taking arms against a sea of troubles,’ I have always required and received a regular account of their stewardship, and have omitted no care or counsel which could improve their system.

"But this motherly care and watchfulness has not been sufficient for me. I have had a canker in my heart, 'yea, in my heart of hearts,' for the loss which Margaret had sustained by the unfortunate failure of Robert, a failure caused, he assures me, and you well know how profoundly he comprehends the principles of commerce, by the vicious system of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England. I have felt, day and night, that until compensation and restoration should be made, I was in a false position, and ashamed to behold my natural face in a glass. But how to make it—'ay, there was the rub.'

"I have left no stone unturned to replace my beloved husband in his proper position. 'The labour we delight in physics pain.' And I am proud to say that I have succeeded. Were you, dearest Armandale, in England, I would never, never forgive you, did you not instantly seek the above address, and find your brother and sister once more installed in comfort, I might almost say in luxury, and eager to place all at your feet. 'If we grow, the harvest is your own.' But since this cannot be, and 'the multifarious sea incarnadine' rolls its blue waters between us, I must assure you that, to a happier or more refined home no one would wish to welcome a loved one. 'Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.'

"But this is not all—indeed it is nothing to what I have to say. A dear and valued friend of earlier and happier days, who has been acquiring a vast fortune in the confidential service of the Emperor of Russia, has returned to England with his wealth, but wifeless and childless in his voiceless woe. His first care was to seek us out, his old friends, and had we desired it, he would have poured his treasure into our laps *usque et nauseam*. But this we would not bear, and the wealthy, yet solitary man, looks to us, I may say to me, for an object to enrich. Can you doubt that my instant thought flew to our beloved Margaret, or that I resolved that she should be his heiress. He can repay tenfold the love of her infant days, and it rests but with you to speak the word, and make her 'rich indeed.'

"I would ask you, therefore, to send over such a letter as will enable me to reclaim my darling niece from the wilds of St. Oscars, where she blushes unseen and wastes her sweetness on the desert air; and I will fetch her to town myself. In these days travelling is a trifle, and we put a girdle round the globe in twenty minutes; and she shall be kept here as a sacred thing. The Cressus of whom I have spoken is a Mr. Keckling: I believe he is a Hospodar or Bolivar, or something amounting to a marquis, in Russia, but here he scorns titles—'A man's a man for a' that!' and for him to see will be for him to love her. So write by return of post.

"And now, dearest brother, permit my Robert to add his most sincere, penitent, and cordial love. His heart is too full to write to you now, but he will do so by the next mail. He exults with me at the idea of Margaret's future happiness.

"Believe me, dearest brother Armandale,

"Your ever affectionate Sister,

"HENRIETTA SPENCER."

"CAPTAIN SPENCER,  
H.M. —th Regiment, East Indies."

"P.S. Were other reason wanted why Margaret should now join us, it would be that, in the respectable and religious family at St. Oscars, there are two young men growing up with her, and the example of her poor Aunt Cheriton might lead her to form an early and hasty marriage. The sooner, therefore, that she comes up to us the better—and I think you will say, marry come up!"

Mrs. Spencer did not see any necessity of taking her husband out of the liquidated debt and sewage in order to read this letter to him, but despatched it on her own account; and as she happened to write on mail-day, but not to send the epistle to the post (the reason being that she had no money, and prepayment to India was necessary) until the following morning, it waited a fortnight. But it went off at last, and we have read the result in the letter received at St. Oscars.

Mind, I do not think the woman meant mere downright lying in her statement about Mr. Keckling and his money. As the story rose under her hand, it became a very probable thing, in her judgment, that he should make Margaret his heiress; and the more she wrote, the more and more proper it seemed. And when she wafered the letter she had quite come to the determination that the Russian should do as she had promised in his name, and she began to consider the means of bringing about such a result. However, have Margaret to town she must and would; and what a large and resolved woman must and will do, she generally does. I would respectfully but strongly recommend any young gentleman desirous of marrying, but not confident in his powers of pushing his way through the world, to look out for that type of female. I do not think that, in such a *ménage* the butcher's, brewer's, and wine-merchant's bills will be quite so small as in some which have lately been published in order to show the price of a wife; but she will open, and if necessary shove open, so many doors of providence for you, that such a union will be decidedly a frugal marriage. Try, young gentlemen, but be bold—faint heart never won fat lady.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### MARGARET AND ANOTHER.

WHEN a bad person gets on well, it is a bit of luck; and when a good person gets on well, it is a special Providence; and you can apply which term you like to the circumstance that Mr. Keckling's patience with Mrs. Spencer endured so long after the date of her Indian letter as to last until Margaret had been brought to town. For really the Shakspearean lady gave him a great deal of trouble. Of course she never paid her rent, and he had to do it; and of course she never paid the instalments by which she had agreed to purchase her furniture, and of course he had to do that. But then, having opened this vein of gold, she was always working it, always either borrowing his money, or getting his name to a bill which he had to take up, or

drawing for little amounts with cheques that were invariably presented at some aggravating time, or giving him as a reference to shopkeepers, or making him useful in some way. He was very good-natured, but good nature has its limits; and I almost think that Mr. Keckling would, in a fit of irritation, have taken himself out of town and left no address, in order to throw his persecutrix off the scent, had not Margaret appeared upon the scene.

The old Russian merchant was greatly delighted with the beautiful girl from Shropshire; and though he had as much intention of making her his heiress as Russia has of paying us the costs of the suit in which we got our verdict in the Crimea, he did a good many pleasant things for her, and he bore a good deal of additional worry from Mrs. Spencer for Margaret's sake. He undertook to show London to the young lady, and the kind old fellow took the trouble to map out each day's excursions so as to embrace every object of interest in the section assigned for exploration, and to read up the history of the streets in Mr. Peter Cunningham (if that can be called trouble), and to introduce her to the metropolis of the world with an elaboration seldom bestowed upon it by Englishmen, who, nevertheless, will study every street of every wretched continental town in which they find themselves, with as much respect as if they were surveying Jerusalem. The days on which Mrs. Spencer could not come, with her mock enthusiasm, quotations, and bustle, were the pleasantest, for then the old gentleman had the double delight, usually and cruelly denied to old gentlemen, of talking and of being listened to. But it was seldom that Mrs. Spencer would miss an expedition, for a reason—or rather two. She did not care about St. Paul's, or the Tower, or Whitehall, or the Abbey; but as the hospitable merchant always broke the day in halves with a lunch, and ended it with a dinner, she endured what she considered a bore for the sake of the accessories. Margaret, on the other hand, was delighted, not having then seen enough of sights to know that one sees them only for the sake of saying that one has done so, or for the sake of somebody else. The country girl thought Henry the Seventh's Chapel and Queen Elizabeth's Armoury quite worth visiting, even in company with a grey-headed old gentleman who wore a velvet skull-cap, and never paid her a single attention beyond that of taking care that she saw everything and understood everything. And by the time that her educational tour had been completed, she knew so much of London that in after times she wrought calm havoc with the enthusiasm of many very gentlemanly British monkeys who had seen the world on the Continent, but did not know Aldgate from Alsatia.

Mr. Keckling, too, it was who got Margaret and her aunt the card for the manager's party. The merchant had known and obliged that gentleman in his time. The manager had wanted, for a month of his season, a certain dancer of world-famous renown, but she had accepted a St. Petersburg engagement. To chase her thither, to offer her double terms to break her bargain, and to carry off the fair creature with all her uncles, mothers, dressers, secretary, and the rest of the rabble that cling to the gauze of these idols, would have been matter of course in a civilized metropolis. But not so in Russia, where you

must have a passport from your bed-room to your dressing-room, and it must be *visé* before you may go thence to breakfast. Bribery had to be performed on the most extensive system, and which embraced almost an infinite series of payees, from a very great noble down to a sentinel on duty, and then there were other bribes which went no one dared guess were, except that the money was taken. The Russian court did not care about ballet that year. Mr. Keckling, who knew every rascal in authority, and who could tell to a paper-rouble for how much he would sell his own father, was very useful to the manager in seeing that he did not throw away more silver roubles than could be helped. And, finally, when the dancer, who was a clever girl in other ways than in *entrechat* and elevation, found that she had several debts which must be discharged before she could go (indeed, a departing traveller must advertise in three Russian papers, and if you want your name spelt wrongly, so as to hide you from the creditors you affect to warn, you can manage that too, with money), Mr. Keckling saw to this also, and bribed a police officer to frighten the tradesmen into charging not more than three times what was fair. Judge therefore, whether the manager, whose success with his new card had been splendid, was not ready to be grateful. And as all men are grateful, and managers in particular, the invitation was procured, and used as we have seen.

Thus, *vid* Mr. Keckling, did Mr. Philip Arundel obtain his introduction to Miss Margaret Spencer. The opera-box followed, and then Mr. Arundel made his own play. He was invited to Gower-street, and he went ; and being a young gentleman of tact, he paid such attentions to the elder lady of the house, that his being asked again, and his afterwards being specially requested to come, and his finally coming to the dignity of being reproached for his absence, duly followed. And there he is ; and what word is to describe his position ? To say that a man is in love is old fashioned, and they tell me, vulgar. I should like to say that he was enchanted by her charms, but the words have been so hackneyed, that all the downright black magic they imply is forgotten—that charms mean the implements of a witch, and enchantment means the way she works with them. Let us leave the affair without a definition. He is always at the house because he meets Margaret there.

And now comes an exceedingly high, great, and doubtful question. Is Mr. Arundel worthy of such a prize as Miss Margaret, and are we to permit her to smile upon him ?

Well, what is to be done ? Philip Arundel is a well-born, highly bred, gentlemanly young fellow, decidedly handsome. He has been to Eton, and to Oxford, so he has associated with the best sort of men ; and if in reading a newspaper he comes upon a Latin quotation, as *fruges consumere nati* in a corn-law article, or *virtus nobilitas est solum* in one on an hereditary peerage, he need not slur it over like a snob. Next, he is certainly good tempered, and so far as one can see, good natured. Touching his financial position more will be found in the adjoining chapter. But supposing that to be all right, what has anybody to say against the pretensions of Mr. Arundel to the hand of Miss Spencer ?



Somebody says that there is "nothing in him." If that is a young lady who is speaking, I know very well what she means. The sight of a beautiful being like Margaret has not awakened in him a new life, a new soul. The touch of her hand has not given an electric thrill that has shot into his being, and revealed himself to himself. The sealed fountain has not burst forth as the sealing-wax melted under the fire of passion. Oh, I know all that. But surely you do not want that *now*. In these days of French novels, and novels on the French model, would you have a young fellow feel all that in presence of the girl whom he wishes to make his own wife? Time enough for that when he meets somebody else's. Pray be reasonable, and let us go on according to the rules of art and morality.

Nothing in him. Well, I don't know. They have now been acquainted about a month, and Mr. Keckling has made a little party, which just fills a carriage, and has conveyed himself, the two old Spencers, our Madge, and Mr. Arundel, to Burnham Beeches. And in that forest these individuals amuse themselves after their fashion until it shall be time to go to Maidenhead for the sole purpose which would have brought Mrs. Spencer all that way into the country. And the way that Philip and Margaret amuse themselves is by wandering among the trees, and marking the fantastic forms of the old trunks. The Londoner naturally goes into ecstasies with the beauty of the scene and its silence, but the Shropshire girl has seen a good deal of North Wales, and though pleased with the loveliness around, can afford to admire it quietly.

"I think that you don't care about this sort of place so much," observes Mr. Arundel, with that singular neatness of sentence and happiness of phrase peculiar to modern dialogue.

[Nevertheless, Mr. Enfield Speaker, hold your tongue. It may be slatternly talk, but it is a great deal better than what you would have said, Squaretoes. "This especial variety of picturesque scenery appears to possess less attraction for you, dear Miss, than some other class of landskip." Get out.]

"It is perfectly beautiful," said Margaret; "but is not the beauty of the kind that steals and wins upon one, and not that which makes one—what did you say last night?—'strike into an attitude of startled delight.'"

"Clever girl—remembers what I said," thought Philip. "That is so," he said; "that is certainly the great charm here, unless we mention another which we poor Londoners feel when we get into a place like this—I mean the perfect repose."

"That," said Margaret, smiling, "is delightful, if one is not well. And I can also imagine a person retiring into unbroken silence to meditate some great deed, or to reflect on it after it is done. Else, beyond the pleasure of change, I am not sure that I feel the great charm of silence."

"If all the usual things that we think neat did not seem out of place in talking to *you*,—all out of taste—I should answer with an apology for praising silence in a lady's presence."

"O, but pray don't deprive me of the advantage of hearing anything that you would say to anybody else. I always tell you to

remember my provincial education, and how little chance I have had of catching the tone of society."

"And if catching it means making the slightest change," said Arundel, earnestly, "I hope you never will."

"Thank you," said Margaret, with another smile; "but you know I have come to London for my improvement, and I must not neglect myself. How very kind Mr. Keckling has been. I am sure that such pains were never taken to make anybody understand London as he has given with me."

"I won't try to diminish his merit," said Philip, "for he is the very pattern of old gentlemen—I think I like him as well as my own father."

"For shame!"

"Ah! and that would be no slight praise, for my father is the best old party in the whole world. He would adore you, for thinking that we ought to work instead of enjoying ourselves in idleness. You should hear him preach on that text to my sisters, when they want him to take a drive instead of going down to the House of Commons."

"But you do not agree with him?"

"Theoretically, of course; and I can understand a man's working like a steam-engine, working while life holds out in him, upon conditions."

"Conditions on which one is to do one's duty?"

"Is it one's duty to work like that?"

"I have been taught so."

"Well, do you know, I have been taught so too, but I don't think the lesson sank very deep. I used to write in my copy-books that we were to work with diligence, and I have done themes, proving the beauty and dignity of labour; but I am afraid I never convinced myself for one. But," he added, hastily (for having been defrauded of one thing that he wanted to say, he resolved not to lose the next), "let a man have an object in view—suppose it were to secure his own happiness and that of one whom he loved—and he would rush into harness and be checked by no obstacle in the world."

"And you think," said Margaret, with perfect composure, "that the person whom he loved could be gratified at seeing that he would do for her what he refused to do?"

"If she were a woman, yes," said Arundel.

"If she were a Christian, no," said Margaret.

"I am quite sure you are right," said Philip, after a pause, in which I suppose he desired that she should think he had been considering her speech, and had discovered its truth. "Yes, you are quite right. My dear mother would have said the same."

Which he thought rather cleverly thrown in. And then he deemed it expedient to back out of a subject on which he was not prepared to shine.

"Just look at this tree," he said. "It must be hundreds of years old. It gives me just the same feeling that I had at the entrance of the Pyramid."

"You have been in Egypt?" asked Margaret, with much interest.

"I *did* Egypt, as they say, about two years back."

"How delightful! That is no word for it. I don't know a word. But if I were told that I should be taken there next month or next year, I am afraid that I should be of little use to anybody in the mean time."

"You like travelling?"

"I have had none worth mentioning. But to travel through scenery with such a history would not be a thing to *like*, it would be almost as great a privilege and happiness as one can conceive."

"A greater would be the escorting through them one who felt as you describe," said Arundel, with enough gravity in his manner to prevent his answer from sounding like a love-hint. "I can imagine nothing more happy. I was going to say, that at the sort of chimney-hole which forms the entrance to the Great Pyramid, some height from the ground, the platform on which you stand is a single slab of hard stone. On this names are carved after the fashion of travellers; but, although we abuse Brown and Button and such like for doing that sort of Vandalism in our time, there is an interest even in the names of Browns and Buttons who cut them two or three hundred years ago, and are gone to dust. On this slab are some names of the sort, and I lay down to read them. Among them was one Englishman who had been there in sixteen hundred and—what was King Charles the First's year?—I always forget."

"Of course you are laughing," said Margaret; "but if you think that, in the loyal county of Salop we do not know all about King Charles, you are mistaken. A beautiful silver-hilted sword of a Cavalier was found in my uncle's own field."

"I assure you I always forget the commonest dates and numbers, unless I make an artificial memory. I once wanted to punish a cab-driver, and had to recollect his number; and it was only by repeating, all the way home, that the Sikhs showed fortitude, that I could recollect 642; and what's more, the man was right, and I shall be saddled with the memory of his cab-number as long as I live."

"Well, the King showed fortitude; but as it was 1649, you cannot transfer the machinery."

"O, thanks, but I will—that is quite near enough. Yes, I know that it was 1649 on the stone; and I could not help thinking that at the time when England was divided between two frantic parties, and everybody was fighting, and raving, and slaying when he could, one philosopher had stolen away out of the riot, and laid down in Africa to cut his name before the Pyramid."

"If that man had the power of being useful to one side or the other, according to his faith, I am not sure that I honour him for stealing away," said Margaret.

"O, I could not have done it," said Philip. "I should have mounted my horse, and waved my plumes, and drawn my sword, and charged for the King." And as he said it, with a martial gesture, he looked in a moment as handsome a cavalier as ever sprang to saddle for the Stuart. But the youth had been educated amid good society, and instantly subsided into the undemonstrative gentleman.

"I suppose you will be angry with me for saying that I hope you would have charged on the other side," said Margaret.

"What, are you a traitor?" asked he, laughing.

"No, I hope not. But I have been brought up to believe that King Charles was one."

"Ah, I took that side in a debate at Oxford, but I made a poor hand of it. I was much better in another debate, when I was for the King, and abused the fanatics, and crop-ears, and Puritans, and talked grandly about the altar and the throne."

"They must be useful things for an orator," said Margaret. "My uncle came in laughing one day from a vestry, at St. Oscar's, and said that a member who was averse to all changes had declared that the throne and the altar were in danger, because the Board of Health insisted on whitewashing his dirty cottages."

"I must argue the whole question with you, I see," said Philip; "and I shall come to Gower-street for the express purpose."

"But I cannot argue," said Margaret; "and pray do not try to shake my poor opinions, for you have no idea of the trouble it gave me to form any—especially as my two cousins held opposite views, and battled for King and for Cromwell whenever uncle would allow it."

"Lady cousins?" asked Philip, not entirely without apprehension, for of all interlopers a lover hates a cousin.

"O no. My cousin Alban, who is a surgeon, was the stern republican, and applauded the execution of the King. My other cousin, Latimer, is a lawyer, and he contended that it was quite illegal, and wished he had been there to plead for the prisoner."

"Both practising in the country, of course?" said Philip, as unconcernedly as he could.

"No; Alban comes to town to practise; and I suppose that you will meet him in Gower-street."

"Has she come to town to be near him?" thought Philip Arundel. And the thought annoyed him all through an excellent dinner. And he determined that whether he were rejected or accepted, he would ascertain the state of Miss Spencer's heart.

Fortune aided him—fortune, which lurked in a bottle of peculiarly fine St. Peray, whereof Mrs. Spencer partook liberally, talking to match. Talking indeed so volubly that she fairly silenced the others, who seemed, by tacit consent, to allow her to have it all to herself. At last this struck her.

"Why, good people, what are you all so dumb for? Not a word, as Rosalind says, to throw at a dog. Mr. Keckling, you have given us a splendid repast, sir, and we thank you, and I hope your caviare was good; in fact, that it was caviare to the General. Bob, my dear, have you been putting an enemy into your brains to steal away your mouth. Young barrister, have you nothing to say to us? A Daniel, yes, a very Daniel come into the lion's den for judgment. And you, my flower of Shropshire, why are you so silent? Silence is only commendable in a neat tongue that isn't vendible. I should fancy you had lost your heart if you had not given me your word that you were disengaged, and ready for victories. Come, good

folks, fill the bumper fair, and in honour of Maggie we'll drink all friends round the Wrekin."

Philip Arundel not only complied, but looked as if he could have kissed the old lady. And he sang so many songs in his bedroom at chambers while undressing that night, that Mr. Claxton bawled out the most terrific reproaches to him for coming home intoxicated—which he was not in the least, except with a prospect he had set before himself.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A CONSULTATION IN CHAMBERS.

"THIS London" (as certain accurate persons very properly call it, in order to distinguish our capital from its namesake in Canada West), contains many varieties of Chambers for its unwedded inhabitants. The extreme opposites of these abodes, unblest of the saffron-coloured Hymen, but usually decked by as saffron-coloured a Hebe, wrinkled by sixty winters, are often found under the same slates. On one floor is the luxuriously furnished room in which, among Guidos and Correggios of more or less antiquity, his person folded in a soft dressing-gown, his slippered feet deep in the whiteness of a delicate rug, and in his hand a yellow-papered novel, the delicacy whereof is not so evident, sits an Epicurean philosopher, improving his mind until the silver-voiced *pendule* shall bid him dress for dinner. On another floor is a chamber garnished with a thin, old, faded drugget, four chairs of unpleasing dinginess, and a table on which are law papers fresh and fresh (no need of dummies now)—and here, with glasses upon his early-weakened eyes, sits—sifting facts from attorney-chaff, and savage with the matter, yet satisfied in that he has it to deal with—a Stoic philosopher, preparing his mind for a consultation. Each in his own fashion is possibly making his way to different departments of her Majesty's Bench. According to appearances, E. is working towards the Borough and Captain Hudson, and S. towards ermine and my Lord Campbell. But it is not always so. The elegant Swell may, in five minutes, fling away *Fils Dumas* the Dirty, with a slight and contemptuous curse, and may plunge into a great brief, now in his outer and soberly furnished room, and from the pages of that document (lettered on the back with richer gilding than ever adorned printed book) may snatch some point for his eloquent harangue of the morrow. And perhaps, despite all his toil, the other man may break down in the race—perhaps from trying to make too good running—and, with a wasted constitution and broken hopes, may return to his native town to die what the world will call ignominiously. The profound moral of our youth comes back to us at every turn of life. Who has not had his juvenile knuckles rapped for defrauding of a p, or enriching by an uncalled-for e, the golden rule, "Judge not by appearances"?

"The respectable firm of Arundel and Claxton," as in moments of levity (whereof they had a good many) the young Templars were pleased to describe themselves, were lodged in neither extreme. Their chambers, in the row where lodged the sweet Ovid so lost in Murray, so known, so honoured in the House of Lords, presented a sort of mixture of the two styles, to which was added something of a third character, brought from Oxford. They had four rooms, three being bad; and for the four they paid—or occasionally owed—a rent that would have given them a beautiful house three miles away, or a noble mansion in the country. This note is merely a record of a fact, and not a growl at a grievance; for is not the humblest cell in the Temple better than all the stuck-up mansions of yelling Pimlico, and all the solitary halls of the silent provinces? He who denies it knows the value neither of silence nor of sociality.

With three of the four rooms we have nothing to do. Two were bedrooms, and in the third and dreariest snuffled a restless boy, something proud of his dignity of clerk, something interested in the last number of the "Avenger of Blood," yet something pining for the undignified pitching and tossing, carried on by mere boys, who were not clerks, in a yard behind. Sometimes the clink of the copper and the instant clamour of the antagonists were too much for him, and he left the Avenger roasting his father's murderer, and went sulkily to the window to gaze on the plebeians, and to wish that he had not risen from the ranks. Then nobler thoughts came over him; he remembered his salary, and the occasional order for the Adelphi from his good-natured masters, and he went back to the half-cooked assassin who was being so signally served out by filial retribution.

But the principal chamber was a pleasant one, handsomely carpeted, pictured from various collections, and not without its easy chairs for its owners, and similar accommodation for any friend. Philip Arundel's tastes were a little in the way of the Epicurean's above mentioned; but anything like fastidiousness had been corrected in Philip at College; and though there were some engravings, statuettes, and knick-knacks which the elegant gentleman would not have disdained, they were interspersed with articles that he would have removed with a pair of tongs *via* the window. Pipes of all kinds hung about, or littered the mantelpiece, which was further encumbered with quaint tobacco jars, in which terriers' heads, and even the feminine form, were profaned into receptacles for the malignant weed. There was, against a wall, a noble stag's head; but on its branches hung a travelling-cap, a shot-flask, a Highland dirk, and other disfigurements, that made it resemble a stern Christmas-tree. A Gothic book-case was not ill-furnished; but between a Lucretius of 1511 and the "Pickwick Papers" was a cigar cabinet; and the last volume of "Boswell" would have fallen as flat as Jemmy himself did on the pavement of that assize town where he got so terribly tipsy, but that a pair of fencing-gloves buttressed the book, and made you look round for foils and masks. These you sought not in vain, for they were set as an appropriate halo around a bracket, from which, and from the sea, rose Venus Anadyomene.

And here was a consultation going on, though not precisely of the kind the Stoic philosopher was expecting when we looked in upon his industrious dreariness. In an American rocking-chair, and smoking a German pipe, was our friend, Philip Arundel. He was looking exceedingly well, and he was in high good humour. Carelessly dressed, in a shooting-jacket, and with his handsome throat exposed, and with his small feet in slippers, evidently a love-offering from an Ariadne—let us hope she is consoled—he seemed a capital type of the young English gentleman, when perfectly contented with himself, and not dissatisfied with the world. Confronting him, dressed with as much care, and looking almost as well, but with rather more gravity of aspect, was his mentor, John Claxton, who was performing a feat worthy of the admirable Crichton. For, while lecturing his friend upon conduct that appeared to Claxton to merit reproof, he was gradually emptying a tankard that had contained much pale ale, and was also superintending the cooking of a kidney—not in vulgar hunger, but to test the character of a new recipe which had been given him by Alexis Soyer. 'A Skye terrier, lying on a newspaper [on the floor, gazed at the process with much calmness, having a conviction, from old experience, that his master's experiment would end in a failure, which would result in the dish being set before the Caledonian himself.

"I am saying the same thing over and over again, Philip," observed Mr. Claxton.

"That is true, my dear Jack," replied Mr. Arundel, composedly. "But never mind if you are."

"I tell you frankly that I think you are behaving ill in Gower-street, and that's all about it."

"I am very sorry, my dear Jack, that you should think me capable of behaving ill in any respectable house where I am received with hospitality. Fortunately, Mrs. Spencer does not think with you, or I should not be asked any more, whereas I am asked to go there this evening, and hear some music. You see, Jack, that I must have conducted myself with extreme propriety, and not as you did at the Clissolds, when you came in buffy, and made speeches at supper."

"Well, I shall have some words with your governor, and then wash my hands of this affair."

"The sooner you wash your hands, my dear boy, and set the kidney, which looks utterly execrable, before Fizz, the better. I don't see that you need ask my governor's leave; but do if you like, he is a very affable old man, and will receive you amicably."

"If you are determined to talk infernal nonsense when one wants to say a word of sense to you, do it and"—

Mr. Claxton, in his indignation, was about to finish with a recommendation of some strength; but at this instant the overheated sherry in which he was doing the kidney, caught fire, and hissed furiously round the spoiled morsel, so he transferred the commination to the meat.

"As profane a grace as I ever heard, Mr. Claxton," said Philip.

"All your fault," said his friend, abandoning the operation in disgust. "A cook's mind ought to be calm, or how can he work like an artist? I'll try that again, when you are not here to irritate me. Biceps!"

"Yes, sir," cried the student of the Avenger of Blood.

"Come here, sir."

The small clerk entered, and was enjoined to go round to the Iris, in Fleet-street, and get the tankard refilled with pale ale.

"And mind you do go to the Iris, and not anywhere nearer, or I shall find it out, Biceps, and your chances of being Lord Chancellor, a situation which I am aware that your respectable mother intends for you, will be diminished to the extent of your tumbling out at that window."

Biceps, as the boy had been classically christened, his name being Muscle, grinned with a mild pity for his loquacious employer, and departed.

"What do you bully the lad for," said Philip Arundel. "He's willing enough."

"A capital boy, and therefore I take pains with his education. He is very sharp and discreet, I can tell you. He was opening the door for me to go out yesterday, when a man from Gresham's came up to bother for his bill, of course. The miscreant did not know me, for he asked whether Mr. Claxton was in, and Biceps, instead of looking foolish, as millions of brats would have done, saw the situation, and said, 'He'll be in town on Wednesday, sir.' Did he say Wednesday or Thursday, sir?" he added, appealing to me—*moi-même*—and routing the Philistine with slaughter."

"You should pay your bills, Claxton," said Arundel, with much gravity, "and not be put to these shifts."

"Pay your own, and be hanged."

"Such is my intention," said Philip; "I mean as to the paying. And this is what I wanted to talk to you about. I have been putting down everything in the way of debt that I can think of, from Amos to the laundress's book; and if we can't knock out a plan for liquidating we must see about consolidating."

"Dictionary words, both. But what are you driving at?"

"Well, somebody says that you'd better have one big debt than a lot of little ones. The big one is a cannon ball, seldom fired off, and not certain to hit; but the small ones are like shot that are always rattling at you, and catching you when you least expect it."

"And what are you bringing up that old bosh for?"

"Because, as I tell you, I should like to put all I owe into one lump, and have but one creditor."

"Not so easy, my dear boy. But before we go into Committee of Ways and Means, I say, Philip, is this notion part of the folly about the girl in Gower-street?"

"Call her Miss Spencer, please, Jack, just to oblige me."

"I hope I shall be able to call her so for many a year to come," said his friend, adroitly using the rebuke for his own purpose.

"Now see here," said the other, re-charging his pipe. "Why





*Telemachus and Mentor.*



would not the match, supposing I could make it—and mind you, I've no right to say so, whatever I may think—supposing, I say, that I could, why would it not be as sensible a thing as a fellow can do? The governor allows me four hundred a year, and I spend eight; and I haven't a bit of real comfort for it. This sort of thing is all very well when one's a boy, or at College; but at my time of life a fellow oughtn't to be sitting in chambers smoking baccy, and shy about raps at the door. Isn't that so, Johannes Claxtonius?"

"Matter of taste. But I should consider it a deuced deal more humiliating to have one's wife uncomfortable about raps at the door. A woman can't sport a bit of black wood, and make faces behind it at duns when they knock, after the fashion of exemplary parties who shall be nameless."

"Who wants his wife to do so, Jackides?"

"Why, Philip," said Claxton, "what the devil else is before you?"

A knock on private principles was heard, and the speaker hastened to admit Biceps and the beer.

"Give that second knock a little sharper, my boy," said Mr. Claxton, "like this." And he showed the lad the approved signal, rapping the poker upon the hearthstone. "Now, mind—Mr. Arundel and myself are out of town, unless Mr. Ganarew calls—let him in."

Biceps returned to his novel, and his master to his subject.

"I was saying, what else is before you? In the first place, you are over head and ears. In the next place, if you were cleared off you would be in a mess again."

"Never, Jack, never. I swear that not a haperth of milk should come into the place unless it was paid for and a receipt given." And he thought he meant it, too.

"Next, you know perfectly well that the governor would be just as likely to cut off the allowance as not, if you displeased him."

"I don't think he would. Besides, it wouldn't displease him. He couldn't help liking her. Nonsense apart, Jack, come. You danced with her the other night. Isn't she something a fellow might be proud to introduce to his relations?"

"She's very well, but there are plenty like her."

"I will be dammed if there is one," said Mr. Arundel in a rage.

"Plenty, I tell you, you idiot. And instead of selfishly and foolishly making this girl's life unhappy, by marrying her when you have no business to do anything of the sort, wait till you can marry properly, and then you'll find something just as good, that will have grown up for you, and presented herself at the time she was wanted."

"Of course, it is of no use to talk on such a subject, which is one of feeling and not of argument," said Arundel, somewhat loftily.

"O, if you are wrapping yourself up in that sort of thing, I'll hold my tongue till you come out. But I think you had best hear reason. If your father continues your allowance, do you fancy you could keep a wife on four hundred a year?"

"Like an angel."

"Yes, no doubt. But that's not the way girls want to be kept.

And Miss Margaret won't have a shilling. The old girl takes lodgers. She pretends they are visitors—but visitors don't keep their own tea and sugar locked up, as those Martins did; didn't you hear Mrs. Spencer borrow some sugar for the brandy-and-water, and besides, there were other symptoms no one could mistake."

"There was no attempt at disguise. Miss Spencer told me herself that her aunt sometimes added to her income by letting a first floor, and that Jasper Beryl had stayed there."

"Eh, I wish we had been there then. I'd give anything to meet him. Did I tell you what he said to Bob Ganarew, the other night at the club?"

"No, I think not."

"Ganarew, on seeing Beryl, fell into a tragic attitude, and doing a bit of imitation of some actor or other, said, 'Embrace me, my friend.' 'Thank you, no,' said Beryl, 'I'm an author, but I don't want to be bound in calf.'"

"Good. How did Bob like it?"

"O, all right," said Claxton, "Jasper Beryl makes you feel that he says things of that kind out of an overflow of wit, not to hurt you. He declares, too, that it is bad fellowship for anybody who has got a joke to bottle it up and carry it away instead of giving it out to the people about him. And I think he is right."

"Yes, when the jokes are like his; but it would be hospitable in most people, yourself for one, my dear Jack, to bottle up theirs most sacredly, and to lose the corkscrew."

This kind of consultation, in which Claxton's remonstrances were met by Arundel's *persiflage*, and which generally ended by straying as entirely as other consultations (for which unfortunate clients pay by the golden minute) sometimes do from the point in question, were held at all sorts of times and in all sorts of places between the friends. Claxton, to do him justice, worked hard to prevent Philip from moving in a matrimonial direction. He told Arundel whenever he heard of a young couple in difficulties; and when they were out together, Jack Claxton had a marvellous scent for any street where he could show his friend the appalling carpet on the balcony, the sign of an execution. He would lecture Arundel then and there, and make him read how new furniture, and friends' presents, and the Broadwood, and all that had set up the poor young bride and her lover, was becoming spoil of Israel. Even in places of amusement Mr. Claxton did not forget his mission, or over the quiet little club dinner preceding the visit to the theatre. "No opera stalls for muffs who marry on miserable means," he would alliteratively say; and when the admirable soup was followed by the delicate fish, and this by the neatly served "portions," which enable humble bachelors to have, for next to nothing, as well-cooked and elegant food as your Duke, John Claxton would remark, in a melancholy tone—

"Take that last *cotelette*, Philip. Enjoy what Christian meat you can before you come to huge and gory joints, and third days of cold mutton. Eat, my poor Philip!"

But Claxton's great fortress of hope, his Sebastopol, was Philip

Arundel's father. This gentleman, who was, moreover, a Member of Parliament, of no weight save what was physical, resided in Thanington-square, with his two daughters, the Misses Blanche and Geraldine Arundel. Of these two girls Philip was very fond, and they regarded their brother not only as one of the best-looking and best-mannered men in London, but as the greatest scholar that had ever left college, and the ablest young barrister that had ever entered the Temple. Mr. Arundel, the elder, probably took a more moderate estimate of his son's merits, but seldom ventured a word in his disparagement, because on such an occasion either the handsome Blanche or the handsome Geraldine, or both, came up, a sisterly contingent, with such feminine zeal and logic, that the old gentleman used almost to feel ashamed of himself for having found a fault with his son. Now Claxton was a visitor in Thanington-square, and a favourite with the girls and papa, and like a chivalrous friend as he was, he determined to risk the chance, which was, indeed, a probability, of quarrelling with Philip, and by consequence losing the M.P.'s twenty port, and the pleasant friendship of the young ladies, for the sake of saving Arundel from the peril that menaced him. He conceived that he had a very good case. There was a pretty girl, nothing more, who had been brought up in the provinces, in a dissenter's family (Mr. Arundel, M.P., sat on the Conservative benches, whenever the shifting sands of modern politics allowed him to discover which those benches were), and who lived with an uncle whose bankruptcy had been a discreditable one, and whose foolish wife let lodgings. Was such a bride to come to Thanington-square, and sit among the high and mighty men, and their much higher and mightier wives, who often honoured the senator's richly spread board?

It was not in Claxton to command success, though he did more, did Claxton, he deserved it. But love is pretty rapid in its movements; and long before the faithful John had screwed himself to the point of going to the Square, and opening his attack, Philip Arundel had enlisted both his sisters on his side of the question. He had done it artfully, too, that handsome brother; for he had gone home, stayed at home (where there was always a bed for him), taken his sisters out, and perfectly enchanted them by his attentions. And one day the carriage took Papa and his three children to Palace-yard at four o'clock, and the old gentleman having been put down, that, instead of availing himself of that brilliant and beautiful afternoon, he might go into the House and ask a question, about which he cared nothing, of a Minister who knew exactly as much about it, the young people drove on to Richmond, and Philip gave his sisters a pretty little repast, and told them a pretty little story. *He* painted Margaret (and I humbly hope somewhat in the way that another person has painted her) as a sweet-natured and beautiful girl, who had been most advantageously educated in a family where piety was not bigotry, and who had shown her dutiful obedience to her father by leaving that happy home for another, whence it would be delightful to rescue her. This little bit of romance, added to the tiger-story, settled Margaret's business

with the Demoiselles Arundel, and when they came back to London, I believe that not only had they settled that they would receive her with all the affection in the world, but what presents they would give her at the wedding.

Consequently, when the chivalrous Claxton went down on the preventive service, he found his flank turned. When, by way of opening the business, he made a few sarcastic remarks at the expense of an imaginary wife, whom he professed to have met in society, and who, having been brought up as a dissenter, exposed her husband to ridicule at a party by forbidding him to dance, Miss Geraldine observed that the woman was simply a vulgar person, and that in dissenting families of the better class she knew the girls were brought up very rationally; in fact, she had heard from Philip, who knew everything, that it was the best kind of training possible. And when Mr. Claxton tried another tack, and was severe upon marriages where money was not brought on each side, Miss Blanche (who might, by the way, be fighting a little for her own hand, for she then had designs upon a Puseyite curate, who would have spent all her money on ecclesiastical architecture but who providentially died of fever, caught in his incessant visits to his sick poor,) said that a competence was very desirable, but it did not seem to matter which party brought it; and, moreover, this young lady, whose reading had, for the above parenthetical reason, taken a serious direction, hinted that, after all, or rather, before all, one thing was requisite, and that we were told of a kingdom to which, if sought first, all the world's good things should be added. Claxton therefore felt that this garrison was too strong for him, and perceived that Arundel had been fortifying it, and therefore, like a wise man, he determined to risk no desperate attack, but to retain his privilege of talking to the young ladies, and drinking their father's wines. But he had still great hope in the senator.

But you never know where to repose your trust. The great lock that had defied everybody for years, with its offer of hundreds of guineas to him who should open it,—well, a Yankee looked into it, and the captured guineas were straightway seen under a glass case in Hyde Park. That victory, even more than the yacht defeat, the exposure of Woolwich block machinery, and the information that the watch on Somerset House is *not* that of an Irishman who fell from a scaffold and was saved by his watch-chain,—tended to bring about one's final conviction that nothing which one is accustomed to believe is true. One *had* believed in the lock, and revered its splendid defiance with childlike faith and honour, but all is over. Henceforth a man shall say he drove his nail through the moon, and his friend shall confirm the boast, and add that he, happening to be behind, clenched it, and one will neither credit nor doubt, but hear with a mournful listlessness.

The faithful friend of Philip Arundel trusted in his Conservative father to keep Margaret Spencer out of the family. He might as well have trusted to the Conservative party to keep Lord Palmerston out of the Treasury. Claxton's Sebastopol went down. Philip Arundel, when he had gained his own consent to marry our Maggie

if she would have him, took further counsel with his accomplices, Blanche and Geraldine, and then took their advice, which was in itself what might be expected from honourable and virtuous young ladies, and which also happened to be the very wisest which could have been given under the circumstances. This was to tell his father the whole truth. With some fathers this process answers, and as the elder Arundel was a gentleman, and one who happened to like his son very much, it answered in Philip's case. I am averse to specifics, and therefore do not recommend it as a universal remedy for sons in scrapes.

Philip told his father how much he owed, and how much he loved. He added that he had not thought of making any proposal to his creditors or to his mistress, until he had laid the whole business before his parent. This was all so very proper that the old gentleman, though he looked grave, was very gentle, and, adjourning the debate, desired his son to stay to dinner. Philip artfully observed that he had no secrets from his sisters, and this pleased the father again, for the widower was proud of his children, and wished them to live in love and confidence together.

The Contingent charged without orders; but as victory was the result there was no blame. Blanche and Geraldine both assailed their papa, and with the fair round arm of Blanche on his neck, and a ring, once her mother's, on her finger, and with Geraldine's sweet, warm, young face—more like that lost mother's—pressed against his old cheek, what could the father do? They would not dictate—they would not say anything; but Philip's happiness was in question, and papa would do what was kindest and best. The dear old fellow had never done anything else, and was not going to begin altering his course at sixty. The battle was won, and the Contingent rode in glory over the body of John Claxton.

So Philip Arundel, whether his wooing sped or not, was to be relieved from his debts. He was to go to Mr. Tarleton, the family solicitor, and set forth his liabilities, and that gentleman would say who were to be paid in full, and who were to be treated as swindlers, and then he would be furnished with the means to carry out his judgment, and Philip would be free. And as regarded Miss Spencer, the father could trust his son to form no unworthy match—to wed no woman whom he would not set down between Blanche and Geraldine with a certainty that there would be a sister the more. The objectionable part of her family might be quietly dropped, while Mr. Cheriton, whom the girls actually began to love through Philip's account of him, received from Margaret, would of course be welcome in Thanington Square. Indeed, Mr. Arundel had some kind of recollection of the name—whether it had been mentioned to him by Lord Porkington, or some other of the Shropshire magnates, he forgot—but he knew that he had heard it in pleasant association, and would like to know the gentleman.

There, Jack Claxton, what do you say to that? The great lock that was to lock out our Margaret from the Square—that is picked. Go to your chambers and cook more kidneys, Jack Claxton. Ornitho-

logical cooking hath been performed in your case, Anser, as your vulgarer friends would say.

There was one thing more to be done before the young London gentleman could honourably proffer matrimonial vows. There was a letter to be written.

No wrong, save of the most respectable character—so respectable that it passes in a crowd for right—shall obtrude itself in our story. But I am to tell the truth: and the truth is, that Philip Arundel had, in decorous language, to disembarass himself of a connection. Happily for him and for his conscience in the Last Hour, the great crime that lures a helpless being to a life of ignominy is not to be laid to his charge. But in a little box-like house in a suburb—a tiny dwelling, full of comforts and not without elegancies, mostly his own presents—there waited for him, not often in vain, one whose erring but affectionate nature had been developed by his kindness—and who in future would wait in vain.

There was to be an allowance, and I think a small life-assurance, and a confirmed gift of all in the house: and—you are quite right, madam—what more could a Creature expect or deserve?

Nevertheless, Arundel, having written his letter, gave it to his friend to be delivered—that Philip might not know the hour or the day when it would be received, and when the pang which even Creatures can feel would be inflicted in that quiet little home.





*Calypso.*



## CHAPTER IX.

## DEMOSTHENES.

MR. PHILIP ARUNDEL was too much in earnest about his intended match to neglect the means of promoting it. *Qui veut le fin veut les moyens* is a good French saying, take it in what sense you will, and whether Philip's desultory reading had ever thrown it in his way or not, he acted upon its teaching. He spent a great deal of time in the Square. He made himself useful to his father. He made himself an idol to his sisters. And they owed it all to Margaret Spencer, for whose dear sake her knight was content to ransack Blue-books, to compose charades, and to submit to any other duty which his relatives could impose.

"Philip," said Mr. Arundel, as his handsome son came into the breakfast-room one morning, and kissing the pretty sister nearest him and nodding a kiss to the other, began to lay out his plan for the breakfast campaign, "don't you go out to-day until I have done with you." And the elder gentleman, gathering up some letters and the *Times*, and his spectacles, left the room.

"Has he breakfasted?" said Philip, "and am I so late?"

"You are rather late," said Blanche, "but papa has received a letter that has taken away his appetite. I hope it is nothing to annoy him much."

"Nothing about me, I hope," said Philip, anxiously.

"It is a country letter," said Geraldine.

"How do you know, Jerry?" said Philip.

"Don't call me that dreadful name, there's a dear," said his sister, with a piteous look and then a laugh.

"Well then, Jeremiah at full length, how do you know it was from the country?"

"Because it was the only letter with London on the envelope—I think it comes from Shackleby."

"From one of the governor's constituents. Wants a loan of a few hundreds to set up his son in business, or an Under-Secretaryship of State for his nephew, who spoke so well at the last election. There's no harm in letters like that, my children. Bianca, some hot milk in that coffee, please; and, Jeremiah, darling, if it would not be trespassing too much on your humanity to ask you to put some Strasbourg stuff on that toast—that's a dear. But I am not to go out, you heard."

"Perhaps papa will not keep you very long, and then we can have our walk."

"Perhaps. But it is just possible that the interests of the nation may demand that the honourable member for Shackleby should know something about the Tombigbee Boundary question, which is coming on this week, and that the honourable member's son may have to instruct him thereupon, in which case I must shut myself up in the library, and begin by finding out where Tombigbee is."

"For shame, Philip. What in the world *do* you learn at Oxford?" said Blanche.

"That a tongue should be cut thicker than that, my dear—yes, that's better, thanks," responded her brother.

"Tombigbee is a river in Alabama," said Geraldine.

"And Alabama is in—stop, niggers go to Alabama, with their banjos on their knee. I know. Why, here's the governor again."

The senator had got rid of his dressing-gown, and appeared in decorous black, ready for legislative action.

"You are early, sir," said Philip. "You have hardly had a good read at the paper this morning."

"There is nothing in the paper," said his father, a little impatiently. "You have not done your breakfast? Look at that precious epistle, however; that wont hinder you."

As Philip took the letter, Geraldine, seeing that her father was prepared to go out, rose for a little service which she had habitually performed for many a year. When a child, she had rendered it to the tall papa, who used to stoop for it, and who had gradually to stoop less and less, until he found a graceful girl at his side, still ready to do the same affectionate office, and to be paid with a kiss. It was to cut one of what she called her Session Flowers, and to fix it with an ingenious pin in his buttonhole. Of late years, I doubt whether a Teller would have thought he had got quite all Mr. Arundel's vote if he had gone into the lobby without the flower.

The pretty girl bestowed the decoration on her papa, who, for once, paid little heed to her, and watched Philip's perusal of the letter. Geraldine waited a moment or two for her reward, but it was not forthcoming; and she was going to sit down, and wait her paymaster's pleasure, when his instinct told him that he was omitting something; and until he should bring back his attention to find out what it was, he detained her by the hand, and still gazed at his son.

"Shackleby's improving," said Philip, as he finished.

"What do you think of *that*?" said his father

"It is impertinence *in excelsis*," remarked the younger man.

"It is impertinence in Mr. Tommy Coamings," returned the senator, "and impertinence which I shall not get over in a hurry. A deputation to *me*. A deputation to ask me questions, and to read me a lecture for not having imitated some other members, and gone down to give an account of my stewardship. I really don't think you see the full insolence of the thing. Read it again. Read it out, and let your sisters hear it."

Philip accordingly read:—

"The Cross Keys, Shackleby,  
"June 18th.

"DEAR SIR,—At a meeting of electors of Shackleby, held this day at the Cross Keys, at which it was hoped that you would have taken the opportunity of being present, in order to afford some of those explanations of your political conduct which some of the most distinguished men of the time have not disdained to offer——"

"Well, they sent me a miserable little handbill announcing the

meeting, but when I saw it was printed by Tomkins, I threw it in the fire," interposed the senator.

"Quite right, sir," said his son. "The long-winded snob" (laughter from the young ladies) "goes on":—

"It was unanimously agreed that a deputation, consisting of the following electors—namely, Messrs. Wrumble, Blogg, Aniseed, J. Aniseed——"

"That's his ass of a nephew, that uses musk," observed the representative of Shackleyby.

"Beast!" said Philip—"Lockstraw, Davis, and Coamings, should wait upon you at your residence, and should confer with you upon the present alarming and important political crisis——"

"What does that mean?" asked Philip.

"Idiots always think there's a crisis," said his father, "except when affairs really want delicate handling."

"Important political crisis, and ascertain the course which you propose to take during the remainder of the session. For this purpose we shall do ourselves the honour of waiting upon you on Thursday, the 20th instant, at one o'clock.

"I am, dear sir,

"Yours very sincerely,

"THOMAS COAMINGS."

"Marmaduke Arundel, Esq., M.P."

"Why, that's to-day," said Philip.

"Of course, that is the cunning. They knew that if they gave me time to answer I should decline the honour, and so they manage to let me know at breakfast that they will be here at mid-day."

"Do you mean to let them in, or give them in charge to the police," asked Philip.

"Don't be ridiculous, my dear boy. Of course they must be seen, and they must have lunch, or mischief may be done. Hang 'em, I wish they would accept the best dinner I could give them instead of the interview."

"You horribly undervalue your best dinners, my dear father," said Philip, "when you can think of putting one of them before such a set. But you can't receive them to-day, at least not at their hour. Did you not tell me the Nevilbury Election Committee met to-day?"

"Yes, to be sure. Yesterday I was grumbling that I had not claimed my privilege of sixty years to be excused."

"Well, sir, I have a proposition. Let me see these fellows, instead of you. I will tell them that the immense importance of the principles involved in the Nevilbury case makes it essential that you should attend the committee. I will hear what they have to say, and answer for you. And I'll do the honours at lunch, a bore which you will be glad to be relieved from."

I dare say that when Phaeton proposed to drive the chariot of Apollo, the god-father looked a good deal staggered at his son's assurance. Good Mr. Arundel had no overweening idea of his own genius and statesmanship, but he had been a member for a great many years, and it gave a curious wrench to certain of his instincts to hear himself

coolly asked to delegate his functions to a young fellow who was only the other day turning somersaults in a frock and trousers. And that little sensation over, the father's heart had fair play again, and he felt proud that his son could undertake serious work, and pleased that his son had offered to do it for his father's sake, and the look which at first might have had a faint displeasure in it, became dubious and a little wistful.

Not an aide-de-camp ever more closely watched the glance of the Great Duke when in presence of the ranks of France's Italian master, than the sisterly Contingent observed papa when the least thing that interested the adored Philip was in question. They charged without a moment's hesitation.

"O, do, papa," said Blanche, at the table; "you know that Philip speaks capitally. You said so yourself at Lady Milford's."

"Yes, as Demosthenes, in a sheet, repeating words he had learned; but this is another matter, my child."

"But he distinguished himself at the debating society at College, papa," said Geraldine, still in his hand; "Mr. Claxton said that, and you know he is not too ready to praise anybody."

"I assure you, my dear father," said Philip, "that I am not looking at it as a bit of fun, or anything of that sort. If I gave these chaps my own notions of their impertinence, they would not find much to laugh at. But I know that they must be endured as matter of business, and in that way I would receive them in your name. When I say that, I think you may trust me to be serious."

"It shall be so, then," said Mr. Arundel. "I confess that I feel too much annoyed at their treating me in this way to be as cordial as I should like to be with my constituents, and I am not sorry to escape them. But remember, Philip, I trust a good deal with you. Insignificant as these men are, there is not one that might not bother me, and perhaps injure me, if he were offended, and things may not always be as pleasant in Shackleby as they have been, especially now Mr. Ellington is coming of age. And after all, they are one's constituents, and entitled to a certain attention."

"Give me a trial, sir," said Philip.

"Yes, yes, papa," said the Contingent, and Blanche, advancing to support Geraldine, they closed upon the enemy, and took him prisoner. And Geraldine was paid for her geranium, and Blanche had a trifle in the same coin, and ultimately the senator went away to sit with several other senators in a very hot room, over a very foul river, to listen to details of corruption much more appropriate to the atmosphere than edifying to the auditors."

"Papa will be so delighted if you manage these people well," said Blanche. "I know he was pleased at your offering, Philip, but it was your calling them names and talking about the police, that frightened him."

"Can we do anything to help you," said Geraldine.

"O hang it, no," said the young aristocrat; "I'm not going to let Aniseeds come near *you*."

"Never mind that in the least," said Geraldine, if we can do any

good. If they are ever such dreadful creatures, we don't care. Shall we come to lunch?"

"No," said Philip; "because you see, independently of the disagreeableness, I don't know what jealousies we might stir up among the other Coamingses and Aniseeds, by showing these ones too much attention. But I'll tell you one thing. The governor's plan was to hear them first, and afterwards give them lunch. I shall take the liberty of reversing the process. So will you girls give the word, and have a good substantial set-out for them here? We'll have them just shown into the library, to impress them with our learning, then brought here to impress them with our hospitality; and, finally, we'll favour them with a speech to impress them with our statesmanship."

"Shall we send you a table-cloth to make the speech in?" demanded Blanche.

"And a laurel crown, like that you wore at Lady Milford's?" asked Geraldine.

"Go away. You are not sufficiently impressed with the solemn importance of an interview between a distinguished statesman and his intelligent and enlightened constituents. Besides, I want to talk to Edwards about the wine. I'm not going to give them twenty port, not that I grudge it, but because it might make them discontented with the station in life in which it has pleased—and so on."

"I did not think you remembered so much of your catechism," said Blanche, laughing merrily, as the young ladies left the room.

"This will be something to tell Margaret," thought Mr. Philip Arundel, ringing for the butler.

Now the seven wise men who had undertaken the duty set forth in Mr. Coamings's letter had committed themselves to that work in the course of a social gathering at a certain inn at Shackleby, during which *séance* they had talked one another into a good deal of excitement, not much allayed by the exceedingly bad liquors of the Cross Keys. Pen, ink, and paper were unfortunately produced by the landlord, who ought to have known better, and a sort of minute was drawn up and signed by the inflamed politicians, who thereby engaged themselves to go to London and "have it out" with their member. Had it not been for the document, they would probably, upon consideration, have allowed the affair to end with the meeting that produced it, for none of the party stood so high in Shackleby (that is, could be so mischievous) that they were exactly entitled to be impertinent to Mr. Arundel, and they were by no means sure of the reception that might await them. But there was their written determination staring them in the face, and they had not the courage to own to one another that they had been rather foolish over-night. So to London came six of the seven, Mr. Davis staying behind, on the plea that it was his wedding-day, and that his wife would break her heart if neglected on that anniversary; two allegations entirely removed from the facts, inasmuch it was not his wedding-day, and if it had been, Mrs. Davis was much more likely to fracture the head of her lord for any violation of conjugal fealty, than to break anything belonging to herself. The English was, that she had forbidden him

to go. But the other patriots presented themselves at the appointed hour at Mr. Arundel's door.

Philip had not wasted his time, but had looked up the local newspapers giving an account of the last election at Shackleby, and had read some notes and memoranda of his father's agent, so that he managed to know a little about his visitors. And when they were introduced, his reception of them was a very good mixture of dignity and deference. He explained to them the immense importance of the questions at issue in the Nevilbury case, and added, admitting them suddenly to a startling confidence, that his father, who was entitled to exemption from such a service, had undertaken it at the earnest and special solicitation of the head of the Government.

This gave Mr. Lockstraw an opening, and he, being really and heartily a snob, winked, and hinted that such a solicitation by the Government to a member of the Opposition meant a trap.

"I imagine that his Lordship knows my father too well to attempt anything of that kind, Mr. Lockstraw," said Philip, with a grand manner. "And I need not tell you, who have so large an acquaintance with our foreign relations, in consequence of your mercantile connexion with the Continent" (Mr. Lockstraw owned part of a dirty brig that ran to Ostend, and was suspected by the Excise of another kind of running), "that something really worthy of an English gentleman's notice would have been at my father's command, had he chosen to listen to a proposition from Government."

"I know what you refer to," said Mr. Lockstraw.

Philip did not refer to anything, but Mr. Lockstraw whispered his next neighbour that it was perfectly true, and nodded strongly, as if to express his conviction that Mr. Arundel had been offered an ambassadorship, and had declined it from patriotic motives.

"Mr. Blogg," said Philip, "you were engaged in building a beautiful villa some little time ago. I hope that it has been completed to your satisfaction. My father inspected the designs, and has mentioned that it was one of the most charming things he ever saw. He was talking to Sir Charles Barry about it the other day."

Young hands will make blunders, and this was a bad hit. Mr. Blogg *had* been building a something, and detestably ugly and pretentious it was, and having stuck for lack of funds to complete it, a proposition that the agent of Mr. Arundel should aid Mr. Blogg with means for that purpose had been unfavourably received. Mr. Blogg therefore grunted out, in no very pleasant tone, that he dared say he should finish before Sir Charles did, but he took no notice of the compliment.

"Of you, Mr. Aniseed, my father has so often spoken to me that I seem to meet an old acquaintance," said Philip, to the musk-scented young gentleman, for whom he at once conceived a greater dislike than for any of the party. "You delivered some of the most telling addresses of the whole election. We Oxford men sometimes try our hand at that sort of thing, in debate, but there is a reality about your speeches that makes one envious."

Mr. James Aniseed was a solemn looking youth, badly shaved, and with a sepulchral voice, which indeed had been his bane, for it is



difficult to convince a man that what he can say impressively is not worth listening to.

"Reality," he said, sententiously, "must be the emanation of truth, and truth must be the result of inherent conviction, and private judgment. Upon that principle I have ever based my conduct, and without disparagement to the classical acquirements taught in the cloister (he meant Oxford), I am free to confess that I think them hostile to the ratiocination demanded by the spirit of the age."

It was to Philip's credit that he bowed gravely, and quoted to Mr. James Aniseed a nonsense Latin verse, as in illustration of his argument, at which Mr. Aniseed, who only knew the Latin on the bottles of a chemist who had vainly tried to teach him his business, bowed again with a patronizing smile, allowing that the well-known line with which, of course, he was perfectly familiar, was not inapplicable."

At this point Philip received notice that lunch was ready, and to this refection he invited his visitors, with a cordiality that would take no denial, and an assurance that this arrangement would enable them to save time, as his father's labours would be over in an hour, and the proposed conference could then take place. None of the deputation were men to whom the proposition was unacceptable, and they had performed a journey of some hours since breakfast.

An ample banquet, assuming the proportions of a dinner, awaited them, and Edwards had looked out wine more adapted to such a party than was the liquid his master chiefly loved. And Philip did the honours well, and not being entirely unused to the art, caused the glasses to be filled at a very early date after that of their being emptied.

It was not long before Blanche and Geraldine, in the drawing-room, heard loud single laughs, as patriot after patriot thawed, and then united laughs, as they began to tell Shackleby jokes (Philip's scraps of real good things were of course lost upon his audience), and then a great gabble of tongues, which rose high when the parlour door opened, and dulled to the ladies' ears as it closed again. And this went on for a good while after the hour had passed.

We will not linger over the successful banquet as did the consumers thereof. Suffice it to say that Mr. Philip Arundel's health was proposed four times, first, as his father's son; secondly, as his father's representative; thirdly, as a class'cl schol'r and a man of p'found learning (this was from Mr. J. Aniseed, whose sepulchral utterances were rather clipped by this time); and fourthly, as the possible successor of his father in the representation of Shackleby. In each case Philip made a neat and appropriate speech, and, encouraged by the success of the Latin on Mr. Aniseed, inserted occasional selections from the Three Concords and the impersonal verbs, judiciously blending these with enough of sense, and a great deal more than enough of action, and he was wondering which of the two remaining members of the deputation would next rise, when his father's carriage drove up.

The Contingent were down in the hall in a moment.

"Philip has managed everything beautifully, papa."

"They are perfectly happy, papa, and delighted with Philip."

This was in one breath, and before papa could read a note which Philip had desired the servant to give him on his return, and which was to say that Mr. Arundel could come into the party or not, as he pleased, but that Philip could get rid of them without his parent's being bored.

"He has been speaking so capitally," said Blanche. "We could hear him when the door opened, telling them all about the British constitution, and the holy landmarks that were to advance with the spirit of the times."

"A queer metaphor, my love," said the old gentleman, with a smile.

"And—and," said Geraldine, eagerly, "that it was the duty of every member to attend to the interests of his own borough, because then there would be a bundle of sticks. They applauded that immensely, papa."

A shout from the dining-room proclaimed that Mr. Philip Arundel's health was being proposed for the fifth time, and this was by Mr. Lockstraw, who had a hazy recollection of what had been said in the library, and who expressed a hope that a gentleman with such a command of foreign language would be made foreign secretary one of these days. But before the acclamation was over, and while Mr. Arundel's mahogany was being indented by the blows of his visitors, Mr. Coamings, who had heard the carriage, resolved, with the cunning of intoxication, to be first to assure the senator that his constituents were satisfied with him.

Mr. Coamings was a tall, undertakerly-looking man, whose preposterously long back must always have been a trouble to him, and who found it particularly inconvenient to keep it straight under existing circumstances. He managed to wriggle from the room while the others were cheering, and came out as Mr. Arundel was going upstairs, having resolved to leave the whole business to Philip. The senator turned on the stair, and confronted his correspondent.

"Ah! Mr. Coamings——"

"Not a word, sir, not a word," said the other, mysteriously, and with a tipsy smile, and waving his hand as permission to the other to go his way. "Not a word. All is right, sir,—all is right, Mr. Arundel. Never again, Mr. Arundel. I say, sir, never again. All is right. Your son is a wonderful young man, sir, and will live to make you as proud as"—and here the speaker, suddenly overcome by recollection, seemed to have a difficulty in swallowing—"as proud as I should have been of my poor boy if circumstances—but that's neither here nor there. Never again, Mr. Arundel."

And he leant upon the end of the balusters, and continued to nod and to repeat "Never again," as comprising the whole business. Perhaps he meant that Mr. Arundel's political sagacity was never again to be questioned, but nobody ever knew.

It is one thing to let our son make people tipsy, and another to let our daughters behold the tipsy wretches. Mr. Arundel, scandalized that Blanche and Geraldine should be evidence of Mr. Coamings' eccentricities, was motioning to the girls to go up, when Mr. James



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Aniseed emerged from the room ; and being incomparably the tipsiest of the party (from being the most artificial when sober), he no sooner beheld the two ladies than he dropped on his knees and made a desperate effort to recite what in his heart he thought was a love-speech of Romeo's, but which, in his confusion, happened to turn out another celebrated address—

“These are thy glorious works, Parent of Good.”

His voice brought out his brother members of the deputation, and it was to be regretted that Mr. Blogg did not allow for the ease with which a warm-looking but light mat is moved by the foot, for had he done so, he would not have slipped down, prostrating himself before his representative in a way unseemly in an independent elector. The members behind him saved themselves from falling over him only by clinging to the door-posts ; while Philip, enraged with the sepulchral youth for presuming to lay hold of Blanche's hand, darted between, caught him by the collar, and sought to lift him to his feet.

Then each gentleman endeavoured in his own way to make his peace with Mr. Arundel, whom they all thought they had offended, and it was a long time before his hearty assurances that they were welcome, and his taking them back to the parlour and drinking to their healths, convinced them that they were really his friends. Finally, Philip, who kept to his work to the last, sent them all away in cabs, and the last that was seen of the deputation was the long back of Mr. Coamings, who stuck, rather than leaned, from the cab-window, incessantly repeating, “Never again, Mr. Arundel.”

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## CHAPTER X.

### AJAX AND TEUCER.

I PROPOSE to impute as few motives as possible in the course of this history. In the first place, such disquisitions impede the march of the story, and in the second, one is pretty sure never to be quite right upon such points. Our gallant young friend, Charley Limberham, the light dragoon, did a splendid thing in India. He rode under a heavy fire up to a breach scarcely wide enough for his horse, leaped him through, and finding himself charged by a group of armed traitors on the other side, began exterminating them with such earnestness, that when his men came up, they entered without opposition. Charley Limberham is far too haughty a Swell to desire to be praised, except at headquarters, and when anybody spoke to him of his exploit, he always said that his hard-mouthed beast of a horse had run away with him ; which statement was as false as anything can be which it is possible for an officer and a gentleman to say. Young Limberham went at those pagans wilfully, and with all his might. But whether he was inspired to do so by pure military ardour, or by a sort of sarcasm which a certain detested lieutenant-colonel had uttered about the youth's care of

his elegant person, or by the news which he had that morning received, by *dâk*, that his cousin, Arabella Bellew, was going to be married, or by all these screws acting simultaneously, who shall say? He has gotten his Victoria Cross, and long may he wear it.

It would be insulting to the discernment of the reader,—nay, to his powers of eyesight, did we make any mystery about the fact that Mr. Arundel the younger prospered in his suit to Miss Margaret Spencer. My friend Mr. John Tenniel has revealed that fact in the masterly series of medallions which he has carved in my aid, and which are now in the reader's hand. But it may be expected that inasmuch as Mr. Arundel is not exactly a pattern of perfection, some reasons, or at all events, some excuses should be offered why our Margaret, who (as King George the Third stated of the Duke of Gloucester) has her first fault to commit, should smile upon a suitor apparently out of her sphere. I repeat that such disquisitions interfere with the march of a story, and besides, one might give the wrong reasons.

Philip Arundel's attentions were most delicate, but most assiduous, and they were unlike anything of the kind which had ever been paid to the country-bred girl. Then there was Philip's grand air of superiority—not in the least like the swagger of the provincial Galtimore, who spoke loudly to his equals and coarsely to his inferiors, because his father was a rich attorney, and had placed him above the chances of life (for Philip was courtesy itself, and his good-nature certainly found its way into his voice)—but a certain calm loftiness, which disdained to open the question whether anybody or anything pronounced by himself to be good or bad, had right of appeal against his sentence. His gentlemanly ease and his complimentary deference, which pleased without at all disconcerting, were points in his favour, and then his knowledge of the world, and intimacy with a thousand people and things hitherto known only to Margaret as productions of another realm, gave him a great advantage with the young lady from the Welsh border.

*Après*, he was of a better family and better social position than her own relations, and Margaret looked up to him a little, and everybody who has studied the science of affinities knows how favourable that altitude of observation is for discovering merits. He was educated, had travelled, and was, in a sort of slovenly way, intellectual, though he had never been sufficiently in earnest about any object of inquiry to study it conscientiously. Very gentle, and very thoughtful for Margaret's comfort (now that it happened to be his own), and very reverent of what he found she revered, there was nothing in Mr. Arundel's bearing or position that would have justified Maggie in looking upon him with distaste or coldness—and a right-minded young lady is always just, especially when she has to sit in judgment on an agreeable young gentleman.

I am heartily ashamed of myself for these last paragraphs; for in reality, it is for Philip, not for Margaret, that excuses ought to be made, and everybody must see that. A young man of excellent position, an only son, a favourite with his father and everybody else, a young man who might have married almost anywhere, in reason, he is the person to be defended, or to need defence, when he marries a

nobody with a pretty face. Philip is a chivalrous fellow, a hero quite equal in his way to Charley Limberham the dragoon. I trust not to forget myself again, and be again found apologizing for the wrong person. So, let the wedding flutes play, *spargite nuges*, and on, over their crackling shells, to the really starting-place of our history.

It need scarcely be said that, though Margaret was not slower than became a young lady in perceiving the effect of her graces upon the heart of Mr. Arundel, our good Aunt Spencer had beaten her in the race of intelligence. It was our aunt's way, as it is that of many folk of her class, never to let young people of opposite sexes meet without introducing, and that with no particular delicacy, the questions of love-making and matrimony; and though she might have disgusted a circle of more refined people than she was in the habit of delighting by her conversation, she was not disliked, on this account, by the sort of bachelors and damsels of whom her acquaintance chiefly consisted. They liked jokes and hints on these topics, the men perhaps a trifle less than the girls, who know how such business is promoted by its being talked about. But Aunt Spencer's exceeding desire to forward Mr. Arundel's views, and the unhesitating way in which she set about it, more than once nearly brought the matter to an end; and had Philip been a trifle less in earnest, a trifle less sedulous to put himself right with Margaret, after one of Aunt Spencer's moments of especial zeal had sent the poor girl blushing and almost crying from the room, Margaret Spencer would never have seen him again. But Philip's letter the next day was a masterpiece, and his blandness of allusion to her relative, "whose affectionate intentions were not always so well regulated by a sense of delicacy as was to be desired," was a euphuistic expansion of the hearty curse he bestowed upon an infernal old vulgar hag, in a confidence with Mr. Claxton. By tacit consent, Mrs. Spencer was speedily and remorselessly excluded from the counsels of the young people, to her great annoyance, and to her profuse expenditure of passages from *King Lear*.

The courtship, however, suited her very well, for though Arundel never breathed a word, and Margaret never raised an eye, that spoke of anything warmer than the topics of the day, when Mrs. Spencer was present, Mr. Philip pursued a system of attentions which were necessarily shared by that duenna, and which gave her a great deal of the excitement and amusement that her soul loved. And as she got her opera-box, theatre, dinner, drive, sight, or whatever else the lover selected, she put up with her exclusion from his secrets, and it was only when she had been a little over-refreshed by refection that she would look provokingly mysterious, favour him with a nudge or so, and a scrap from Hamlet's charge to his friends to keep the ghost-story to themselves. She would not have liked to hear the way Mr. Arundel talked of her to Mr. Claxton in King's Bench Walk; but the lady must be a very dear lady indeed (and there are some specimens of the class, thank Heaven!) of whom, she being fifty years of age, her friends in chambers always speak quite so respectfully as those years and the grey hairs which must be somewhere under her cap, demand of youth.

Several weeks had passed, and the legitimate opera season had

closed, but a few extra nights were being given, at playhouse prices, and the works of Mozart and Beethoven, which are quite good enough for vulgarians, had succeeded to the noises invented by Signor Verdi for destroying all the voices of Italy. Mr. Philip Arundel had procured a box for a *Fidelio* night, and Margaret had experienced that singular sensation of elevation, and of pleasure of which the soul refuses to be ashamed, which is felt by the young and unworn mind when brought into contact with a creation of genius. The opera was over, and Aunt Spencer, who had of course been terribly bored, and who liked music with tunes in it (as her definition went), was being respectfully inserted by Arundel into the carriage which he had borrowed from Thanington Square. Margaret stood at the door for a moment, at his request, until he should step back for her, and Mrs. Spencer was loudly repeating her hearty admiration of the vehicle and of its soft cushions, when a voice addressed Margaret :

"Shall I take you to your carriage?"

A tall, grave young man stood beside her, and spoke the words as quietly as if he had been her husband, and they had parted a few minutes before.

It was her cousin, Alban Cheriton.

Margaret's fair face flushed deeply, and she looked flurried. She had, in truth, been forgetting Alban a good deal, and there were many recollections which came back with a rush at the sound of his voice.

"O, Alban!"

The words and the tone caught Philip's ear as he returned for Margaret.

A month or so earlier, and he might have been displeased at this meeting; but he had made good use of his time, and believed that he might defy competition. And though, at the first sight of the cousin, a moment's shade came upon Philip's handsome face, he met the stranger with the look of courteous inquiry proper under the circumstances.

The two gentlemen exchanged glances for the first time. They will, perhaps, have some other looks for one another before we have done with them.

"My cousin, Mr. Alban Cheriton," said Margaret, "Mr. Arundel."

Philip's bow was exactly what it should have been, but Alban's salutation was stiff and stern, and I will tell you why directly; but we must not keep a young lady in opera costume waiting in the street.

"You don't know Aunt Spencer," said Margaret. She took the arm which Alban again offered, but gave a little look at Arundel, as if asking his permission to do so, and Alban saw it.

Margaret introduced her cousin to her aunt, and entered the carriage.

"Very happy to make your acquaintance," said Mrs. Spencer, who was always glad, to do her justice, to make anybody's. "Your name is familiar in our mouths as household bread. And *à propos* of that, will you come home and take bread and cheese, and such other pro-





*Wm. Woodcut.*



ceedings as we are charged withal. You have been introduced to Mr. Arundel? All right. Come, then."

Alban made his acknowledgments, and, scarcely knowing that he did so, certainly not knowing why he did so, accepted.

Philip thereupon courteously motioned to him to get into the carriage.

"There," said Mrs. Spencer, "the master of the house invites you. In with you, young sir."

Alban, who had been on the point of entering, drew back.

"I will walk," he said. "The theatre has been very hot. I should like to walk. I will be in Gower-street as soon as yourselves." And he turned, something abruptly, and was gone.

"That he wont," said Philip, laughing, "unless he takes a Hansom cab and an intoxicated driver. We flatter ourselves that our horses can go along better than that." And they drove off rapidly.

"The inferior is presented to the superior," said Alban, grinding his teeth as he rushed up the Haymarket. "And he is superior to all the world and everything in it. And I am to be taken to her house in his carriage. I will go, though. Charity, woman? Get out of my road. There's not much charity in the way to-night."

These extremely incoherent observations, objectionable in themselves, and utterly reprehensible in a young gentleman who had been religiously brought up, were elicited from the young surgeon by the brief interview at the opera door. Yet there was nothing in the external aspect of affairs to justify such demonstrations. He had casually met a very pretty girl, who had instantly introduced him to a pleasant acquaintance, and hospitality was at once proffered to him, with a seat in a most comfortable carriage. I dare say that some of the people who had been standing about the door, and noticed the little scene, envied him, as they went home to their own troubles. Perhaps, too, some of them pitied the beggar-woman whose whine had brought so rough an answer from Alban, whereas she was a professional mendicant whose honest exertions were much favoured by fortune, whose husband was a very good-looking pickpocket, and who ate asparagus and early peas a long time before most professional people get either. We are always misplacing our envies and our pities.

There are not many short cuts between the Haymarket and Bedford-square, so the carriage had the pull, but the ladies had not returned to the parlour, from taking off their opera cloaks, when Alban Cheriton was shown into the presence of Philip Arundel.

"You are a capital walker, Mr. Cheriton," said Arundel, who was in the mood to be cheerful and complimentary. "I should have given you another five minutes, good."

"I walk a good deal," said Alban, coldly.

"Quite right. I only wish I did. But somehow it's difficult to find time for walking."

"Your occupations keep you so closely confined?" asked the other, with dryness.

"By Jove, no," laughed Philip; "again I may say I wish it was

so. But we live in hopes, sir, that metropolitan attorneys will one day discover our merit, and that we shall be paid to destroy our stomach and other comforts, for the benefit of a litigant public."

To this Mr. Cheriton vouchsafed no reply. But he might as well have talked to Philip as taken up Bertha's album, for on the very first page that he opened were some verses (with P.A. at the foot), inscribed by Arundel at Margaret's request, and of which she, holding them to be full of beauty, could have repeated every syllable. Could it have been instinct that led the cousin to dislike them? There was no other reason, for they were good enough for their purpose, and very clearly copied into the book, and he had no knowledge that the initials were those of his companion.

Philip perceived that Alban's handsome but severely made mouth was taking a sardonic expression as he glanced over the poem, and therefore, like a wise author and a Christian gentleman, he determined to forestal any unfavourable criticism, which might have led to unpleasantness, by saying,

"Ah! by the way, I have been unworthily occupying a page in a book that must belong to a near relative of yours. That is Miss Cheriton's album—your sister, I imagine."

"Are these your verses?" said Alban, abruptly.

"Yes, if they deserve the name," replied Philip. "Miss Spencer was kind enough to think well enough of them to let me put them there; but I don't go in for poetry, of course."

"A pity," said the other, in a tone that was so very nearly rude, that if Margaret had not just then entered, and Mrs. Spencer had not followed, and the party had not taken their places round the suppertable, I think Philip would have tried a retort. But he was in high good humour again in a moment, and was speedily engaged in what he called promoting supper.

"Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table," said Mrs. Spencer to Alban, who did not seem in any hurry to imitate his gay enemy—the word is out. "I am very glad to know you. Indeed, I should have known you anywhere, from your likeness to your excellent and admirable father, who sat, by the way, in the very chair which you now occupy, so you must represent him to advantage. I think you are graver than he is, and pale with the overcasting sickle of thought; but never mind all that now."

"It is something new for you to visit a theatre, Alban," said Margaret, smiling.

"And to meet you there," was the cold reply.

"No doubt," said Aunt Spencer, "and both you young people were brought up to deny yourselves all sorts of rational pleasures, and to believe that thereby you were earning yourselves heavenly mansions, eh."

Mrs. Spencer's abominable ignorance of evangelical doctrine drew but a hasty glance of contempt from Alban Cheriton, who had deeper matter in hand than a chattering old woman's theology.

"But I am glad that you have both grown wiser. Noo savong charnjay toot slar," added Mrs. Spencer, very properly pronouncing

her words with distinctness. "I think that Margarita is almost as fond of a theatre as her aunt."

"Not quite, aunt," said Margaret, who scarcely wished that Alban should think she had entirely forgotten the serious teaching of St. Oscars."

"Well, when she is in good company, at all events," said our aunt, giving Alban a sensation of torture which she was far too good-natured to have inflicted voluntarily.

"And no one could be in better company than Beethoven's," said Philip. "It is an epoch in life to hear that prisoners' chorus for the first time."

He looked at Margaret as he spoke, and I dare say meant her to feel that he would have added, but for the others, that he was enchanted that such an epoch in *her* life should have occurred in his presence and through his means.

"I suppose the opera was good enough for fine ladies and gentlemen, with their ready ecstasies," said Alban; "but it was disgraceful as a musical performance, and to anybody who really knows Beethoven it must have been offensive."

"Am I to be ashamed of having been so much pleased," said Margaret. "I am very sorry, but I have seldom enjoyed anything so greatly."

"Accept my congratulations," said her cousin.

"I did not think much of it," said Aunt Spencer; "not that I am not very grateful to you, Mr. Arundel, for giving us the treat; but the music is not to my mind."

His box, too, thought Alban.

"Very well, Mrs. Spencer," said Philip, "then we must try again, until we find something that is to your mind. We will see what else they are going to give before the house closes."

"O, it's very kind of you to take it so," said aunt, "but I did not mean begging. Besides, you have been so excessively bountiful that you ought not to be taxed any more. We must have been out with you one way or another at least twenty times."

Do you hear that, Mr. Cheriton?

"Very happy to have been in any way useful," said Philip. "I don't call myself a useful being, by any means; but we are happy to do what we can. Mr. Cheriton, shall we have a glass of champagne to our better acquaintance."

Alban could but assent, but he went through the ceremony as sternly as he might have done had one glass been poisoned, and the spectators were waiting to see which guest would fall down. Something in Philip's manner as he finished was noticed by the hostess.

"You may look," she said, "and you are right. It is one of the bottles you said you lost to Bob, about which we believe as much or as little as we like. But Mr. Spencer's wine-merchant has disappointed him in an order, and so I wouldn't stand upon *my* order of going to the cellar, but went at once to your case. Capital it is, too, is it not, Cousin Cheriton?"

"Excellent," murmured Alban. It spoke well for the young man's

principles, that amid all his agony and his wrath at having his cup literally filled to the brim, by taking his enemy's drink, he was not betrayed into slandering good wine, though he would have given worlds to abuse it and the donor. How Alban did hate that gay, handsome, well dressed young fellow, who sat there talking and laughing, and trying to make himself agreeable, and evidently succeeding.

Yet, look at them, even under the disadvantage sustained by the young surgeon, of being miserable and savage, while the other is proud and triumphant, and see which is the superior man. Philip is the model of a light-hearted, prosperous young aristocrat, and just now he is looking very well, and acting very well, and meaning very well, and he is carrying all before him that he seeks to carry. But look at the other's broad brow, and piercing gaze, and calm strong features—not so calm, now, as they should be, but he will master them and the passion which disturbs them—and mark his voice (confound him, that, too, is out of tune to-night), when you shall hear him speak on a matter worthy an earnest utterance. Life has been variously likened, first by poets and then by every stupid idiot who can sound a cuckoo-note, to a road, and also to a battle. Regarded as a road, life would be made very pleasant by the cheery companionship of our Philip, who is just the friend to lighten a journey. But if there is to be a battle, let one's ally be Ajax rather than Teucer, and that fearless brow and stalwart arm of Alban's were good things to have by us in the hour of peril. I am thinking of Margaret and her future destiny, and but that it was not I but fortune who chose her partner for her, I should fear that she might have right to complain that the best had not been done for her. But this is not my fault, and, moreover, forebodings are extremely profane. Is not everything for the best?

Alban Cheriton must have known that it is, but upon that evening he did not seem inclined to act up to his knowledge, and as the American divine observed, he backslided uncommon. He got into a very dangerous and improper mood. Continuing, throughout supper, conversation of the same agreeable kind as that which hath been recorded, he took the earliest opportunity of rising to depart, and his answer to Mrs. Spencer's invitation to come to see her whenever his engagements would allow, was as cold as anything could well be. He made no doubt that Philip Arundel would avail himself of his position in the family to remain, but Mr. Arundel had reasons of his own for leaving at the same time. One of these was a notion that Mrs. Spencer would feel a call to examine Margaret as to whether her cousin had not been an admirer of hers, and though Philip was far enough from suspecting what the truth was, he knew that the elder lady might be champagnely inclined to say things which in his presence Margaret might not care to hear—as jests about new loves and old ones, two beaux to her string, and other novelties dear to vulgar women. Moreover, he wanted to get to the Square, where he stood so well, and desired to continue so to stand. Therefore the young gentlemen went away together, and Alban was submitted to the further indignity of being offered a choice cigar from the case of his rival.

But this he refused, and also evaded the question as to which way he was going, and speedily and with brief farewell, left his enemy.

Philip went to Thanington Square, and finding his father detained at the House, which sat to an unreasonable date that year, waited up for the Senator, and had a pleasant filial chat with the old man, received new assurance that all should be put right for him, and that his father would do everything in his power to promote his happiness.

Philip was asleep and dreaming (if people do dream when really asleep) of Margaret's being presented at Court, in all loveliness of face and costume, while

Alban was striding up and down Waterloo-bridge, and thinking more wickedness against the scheme of creation than I would write down for the price of the united fame of Bayle, Voltaire, and Shelley.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### UNCLE HENRY.

EVERYBODY has a right to be in a rage occasionally, but one should use privileges with moderation. Twice we have seen Mr. Alban Cheriton in a state of extreme wrath, first, when he found out that his cousin did not care about him, and next, when he found out that she cared about somebody else. It was scarcely the part of a reasonable and moderate man to indulge himself in further self-torment in connexion with the same object. And so Alban, having toned himself down and wearied himself out by walking to and fro upon the earth until the autumn morning began to dawn, found that he was again master of himself until further provocation should produce a new rebellion on the part of the most intractable of all vassals, Self.

And he, like his brilliant and prosperous rival, had work to do, but it was not to talk humbug to humbugs. His active life was passed in earnest discharge of the duties of his profession, and to this he gave himself with his whole strength. Even after the agitation of the night that has been described, and after a very few hours of rest, Alban Cheriton addressed himself to his daily duties with a resolution that no thought of what had so moved him should with his consent intrude upon the hours of labour. He kept manfully to his purpose, and when such thoughts came unbidden, he sternly scared them from him, as when the birds came down to the carcass Abraham drove them away.

He stood daily and nightly by many a sick bed, heard many a cry of anguish and many a repining word. He gathered wisdom, that is certain, and perhaps he learned lessons of forbearance and compassion beside the couches of the afflicted. We shall see. If such lessons are not taught in the school where the healer learns his art, I know not where we should look for the instructor.

Leaving him thus worthily occupied, let us note how others were engaged, and chiefly let us speak of her for whom we are most concerned.

Margaret had fulfilled her promise to be a regular correspondent of her aunt, and for many weeks her fresh and pleasant letters, describing what she saw in London, and otherwise filled with the light-hearted talk of an intelligent girl, introduced to new scenes and sensations, were read at St. Oscars with almost unmixed pleasure. It was sad to have lost her, but it was well to know that she was enjoying the morning of her life. So felt Mr. and Mrs. Cheriton. But gradually the letters became graver, and yet graver, and the sketches less vivid, and the playfulness began to vanish altogether. And then, again, it broke out in a fitful manner, almost amounting to levity, and the tone of the girl's letters was felt, by her aunt at least, to be forced, and to indicate that they were written as a duty rather than as a pleasure—and yet gushes of the old affection showed themselves at times, and the writer seemed on the eve of opening her heart, and then to check herself, and question on question about St. Oscars, and friends of no very high account, took the place which appeared to have been meant for something more interesting. I do not mean to say that the Cheritons traced all these symptoms in the order of their progress, but when Mrs. Cheriton, months afterwards, found heart to read Margaret's correspondence by the light of subsequent events, the process through which the girl's nature had gone was perfectly apparent to the sorrowful mother.

The sorrowful mother. For the letter came at last in which Margaret Spencer, once more writing as the affectionate and cherished child of the country home, revealed that Philip Arundel had made her the offer of his hand, and that she saw her happiness in accepting it. The letter in which she begged their counsel—I think insincerely—the letter in which she begged their prayers, I am sure with all the sincerity of a religious heart. Little did she dream of the sorrow she was causing in her former home. For remember, that though it were idle to suppose her blind to the admiration of her cousin Alban, she had no reason to imagine that any of her relatives but Bertha were aware of it, far less that it was the dearest wish of her aunt and uncle that Alban's suit should be plied, and be successful. The short, grave, not unkind, yet not caressing answer which she received from her uncle, who promised to write more fully in a few days, but in the mean time earnestly counselled her—as she had asked for counsel—to spend much time alone, and on her knees—surprised Margaret, and indeed grieved her. Shall I say that the womanly heart, rising into dignity under the influence of a new feeling, akin to love, began almost to hint at rebellion against advice that savoured a little of dictation, a little of an undervaluing of her own sense of responsibility? I will not say this, if it lead to the least disparagement of her very sweet nature; but if the truth is to be spoken about Margaret as about other people, I am afraid there was something of this kind. She certainly did not write again to St. Oscars, although the promised epistle was delayed for more than a week.

Mr. Cheriton and his wife, as ever in cases of trouble, sought advice and consolation from each other.

"This was what I feared," sobbed the mother. "Poor, poor Alban."

"Poor fellow, indeed," said Mr. Cheriton. "And he has in some measure brought it upon himself."



"Henry! How?"

"You remember our conversation before I took Margaret to London, when he had chosen to leave us. I hoped that he meant to seek her out, and to tell her that he loved her. He has never been near her, until, his liking for music having taken him to a theatre, he accidentally meets her, and spends an evening in her society. That is not the way to prosper in such matters, Nelly."

"How can you blame him, Henry dear, for his delicacy in not intruding upon the Spencers until she had had time to become settled?"

"His father intruded upon the Spencers, without much regard to ceremony, when somebody whom he loved was to be found with them."

"You are different men, Henry. You are impulsive and unhesitating; Alban is determined, but he is shy and proud, dear fellow."

"I honour and love him for his self-respect, Nelly, but I fear it has lost him Margaret. It is not surprising that she should have found many persons to admire her, or that she should have been pleased with one of them."

"She never valued Alban rightly," said the mother, "or she would not have yielded to the first fashionable butterfly that was pleased to notice her."

"Be just, dear Nelly, even though we speak of Alban. He had never spoken to her of his love."

"She must have known it."

"Perhaps. Then again, you may wrong this young man by speaking contemptuously of him. Margaret has had offers, and is scarcely the girl to be deceived by external appearance. Mr. Arundel may make her a very excellent husband."

"Don't defend her, Henry. I used to love her very much."

"And so you do now."

"I hope I do—I am not sure. But I cannot bear to hear her defended for slighting such a being as Alban, for anybody."

"Has not Alban slighted her? He allows her to go to London without a word from him —"

"Henry, how unjust, love! Did you not yourself say that her guardian having claimed her, it was not under our roof that Alban should try to engage her affections?"

"I said so to you, Nelly," said Mr. Cheriton. "I never said so to him. That would have been the decision which you or I should have been bound to give, had we been consulted. But Alban did not happen to consult either of us, and I am afraid that we should have forgiven him, if a young, warm heart had prompted him to forget the exact line of duty."

"And you are actually blaming him, Henry, for having acted more honourably than you expected."

"Not I, Nelly dear, so do not look angry."

"Angry with you?" And her hand lay in her husband's.

It is a good plan to adopt in conjugal discussions when differences arise. The tongue is very proud, abominably proud and sulky, and often refuses to say what the heart desires should be said, but the

fingers know their place, and are ready to convey an apologetic or forgiving pressure which will stop ninety-nine quarrels out of a hundred, if the parties love one another. Specially will a wife do well to accept such a demonstration from her husband, as full acknowledgment that he has been wrong and unjust, and begs her pardon ; statements which it is evident that no man, with a real sense of his manly dignity, could utter under any circumstances whatever. This digression has given the Cheritons time to think again over the subject before them.

"And now, Henry, what can be done for Alban ? Is Margaret to throw herself away upon this Mr. Arundel, and break Alban's heart ?"

"My dear Nelly, if he will not act for himself, what can we do for him ? We know nothing of Mr. Arundel, but we know Alban pretty well, and it is not too much to say, that if our boy gives himself fair play, he ought to fear no rival. This he does not choose to do."

"Let me go to London and see Maggie."

"To say—what ?"

"To say what, if I had said it when she was crying in my arms at the idea of leaving us, would have spared all this misery."

"Nelly, the thought now in your heart is a wrong one. No, it is not in your heart ; and were that hour to be gone through again, you would behave as nobly as you then did. But about your going to London. If you imagine that any good can be done, go by all means. But I confess I read in her letter that her mind is made up, and that she has pledged herself."

"She asks our advice."

"The tone in which you said that shows that you have answered yourself, Nell. You know what asking advice means."

"I should like to go up, Henry."

"You shall go by the first train in the morning, dear. Old Galtimcre is going up, I know, so he can take care of you. If he knew your errand, he would be the more interested."

"How inconsistent it is of Margaret. She refused young Galtimcre because he was a vain, worldly young man, and now she accepts a person who is all that, and perhaps worse."

"A woman's consistency at nineteen, love, is a thing as much to be desired, and as little to be expected, as a woman's justice at any age at all."

"Why, dear, allow this. He must be a worldly character ; he takes her to the opera."

"Where they meet Alban."

"You are determined not to be pleased with anything the poor boy does, Henry," said Mrs. Cheriton, performing a manœuvre akin to that of castling at chess ; "but I know you feel as strongly as I do about him."

"I do indeed, dearest, and I intend to go to London with you, and to have one talk with Margaret. We shall see whether her old uncle's pleading will have no avail with her."

"You will plead for Alban ?"

"No, but for Margaret. I will not name Alban ; I have no right

to name him as he has refused to speak for himself. But I will strive to make her assure herself that she is choosing the husband a Christian girl should select—a husband who will be her strength and support, and not her temptation. I will see whether all our care for her immortal welfare has been permitted to be thrown away. This, Eleanor, I have a right to do,—more—it is my duty, and if its discharge leads to the putting an end to this engagement of hers, well and good, if not, we shall have done what is right.”

“Then you think I ought not to go up,” said the mother, wistfully.

“You hope that you still love Margaret. Why not join me in showing that you do? We will go together.”

He was a very good man, and very sincere. I do not know whether he held in his inner soul a conviction that woman’s nature does at times prove too strong for her sense of right and wrong; that Alban’s mother would find a time to speak out, and that Alban’s father would be glad that she should.

But their plans were crossed by a letter next morning from Alban himself. It was written in his usual thoughtful style, had words of affection for his mother, and some hospital experience for his father. In the course of the letter was this paragraph.

“On Tuesday night there was some Beethoven music at the opera-house, and I was tempted to go. The performance was inferior to what I expected, but Beethoven, my dear mother, wrote too legibly to be so misread, even by blundering scholars, as to be unintelligible, and the evening was a pleasant relaxation. After the opera, I had a curious meeting. I found our Margaret at the door, and I went to the Spencers’ to supper. There was a young gentleman of the party, a son of the Tory member for Shackley, Mr. Arundel, and I suppose that Margaret will be Mrs. Arundel the younger—Mrs. Arundel, in fact, for the father is a widower. The family is highly respectable, and I do not imagine that we have so implanted our noncon. and radical doctrines into Margaret’s mind, that she will not be open to conviction that a conservative with a carriage is a desirable person to marry. But perhaps she has already told you all this, and more. If so, why have I not heard of it?”

“Is that the writing of a young man who is going to break his heart?” said Mr. Cheriton to his wife.

“Alban from his childhood concealed his feelings,” said the mother. “We never quite understood him.”

“But evidently there is enough to show that if we took any step in his behalf, now, he would repudiate it. Margaret has declined to see that he loved her, and has smiled upon another. Your proud boy has done with her for ever.”

It looked very like it, and Mrs. Cheriton gave up her idea of the journey to London; yet the mother’s heart was at times tormented with misgivings. She would read, and re-read Alban’s letter, and wonder why he had informed himself so carefully of the position of the Arundels, and whether, having done so, he was in hopeless despair of the son of a country surgeon being able to compete with young Arundel. “Our” Margaret—had this affectionate term slipped out by accident, and did it show the real feeling of the writer? With

sundry other speculations, made in all a mother's earnest and yearning love, and not unfrequently with the tears dimming the reader's eyes. He is happy who has never caused those tears to flow, save from the overflow of love.

But Mr. Cheriton, though he felt that his son's chance was at an end, fulfilled the mission which he had assigned to himself. He went up to London, arrived, without warning, in Gower-street, and saw Margaret. They took a long walk in the Regent's-park together, and Henry Cheriton very faithfully and very affectionately set before the agitated, but not unthankful girl, the view which a religious man of the Cheriton type takes of the marriage vows, and of compact between a believer and a worldling. He reminded her that a union for time might not imply union for eternity, and he dwelt gravely upon the sad condition of the wife who had to look forward to eternal divorce from her husband at the tomb of either. He did not fail, also, to warn her that she might not be privileged, should she contract such a marriage, to keep her own light burning, and that her own soul might be drawn into peril—the more fatally, the more truly she loved the unbeliever. He told her these things, not harshly, but with a low and often broken voice, but he told them as things that he believed as belonging to salvation, and he implored her to be certain that she was marrying a Christian. Those who might altogether refuse to accept his teaching, and who might stigmatize it as either cruel and rash, or as the fruit of a narrow interpretation of divine mysteries, could not charge him with doing his work either negligently or unkindly. The prophet had faith in his message, and gave it as one of inspiration, but he spoke tenderly, and as to a beloved child.

Margaret's tears fell fast—fastest when he sought to be most kind, and almost to apologize for his plain speaking. She clung to his arm, sometimes convulsively. She had little to say, less than he could have wished, but he believed that her conscience was touched, and he felt that his duty was done. Nothing could be more affectionate than their parting.

Nevertheless, the interview of the morning, and some long and solitary meditation by Margaret after it, did not prevent Philip Arundel's knock in the afternoon from making her heart beat faster, and her cheek flush with pleasure. She may have intended to interrogate Philip upon his religious opinions, but circumstances interposed to prevent that examination, as he had but a few minutes to stay, on occasion of that call, which was only to ascertain whether Mrs. Spencer had any engagement for the evening that would prevent her accepting a private box at the Olympic Theatre. And though Mrs. Spencer had none, and Mr. Arundel joined her and her niece in the course of the performance, it is manifest that the Olympic Theatre is not exactly the place for a theological investigation. Next day Margaret did not seem to feel that the inquiry she may have intended was so absolutely necessary, and the longer she delayed it the more impossible it became. However, there was no doubt that, at college, Philip had signed a declaration of belief in the Thirty-nine Articles, and was it for her to doubt his sincerity in his declaration, or, though

she had been brought up as a Dissenter, to set her judgment in opposition to the great and good men who had framed those elastic faith-bands? Philip believed in the Articles—and she believed in Philip.

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## CHAPTER XII.

## A TEMPLE PLOT.

THE courtship prospered. Mr. Tarleton, the family solicitor, who was a union of acuteness and honesty, dealt out stern justice to Philip Arundel's creditors, and speedily aided that young gentleman to see his way to the end of his difficulties. Margaret Spencer was introduced to the Arundel family, and easily effected a conquest of their hearts, the senator being charmed with her gentleness, and the girls by her beauty, which they could well afford to admire, and besides, she had been approved by the infallible Philip. But an obstacle opposed itself to a continuation of the intimacy. The season ended, and of course there was no abiding in Thanington-square. Philip Arundel began to be unhappy.

He was very much attached to Margaret, but was he to remain in town in September and October. For that matter, was she to remain there? Was not Mrs. Spencer going somewhere or other? The idea of Gower-street in those months was preposterous, outrageous, inhuman. But what was to be done. Civilization has its duties, and here was one of them sadly interfering with the happiness of two lovers.

The young ladies would have settled the question in an instant, but for adverse circumstances. If papa had been going as usual to the seaside, Margaret would have been invited to stay with them there, and everybody made happy. But unluckily there was a round of visits to be performed, with sojournings under the roofs of old friends, and six or seven weeks of the autumn were thus laid out for the Arundels. Philip chafed at this, and I believe that to gratify him the girls would have done their utmost to get the visiting given up, but it was manifestly out of the question, and the House having risen, the statesman and his daughters departed for the country homes of their friends.

Mr. John Claxton had remained in London longer than was his wont, and declared that he did so for the sake of Philip, who resolved to tarry as long as he could be seen in Pall Mall, and yet lay claim to the name of a Christian gentleman. And the Thanington-square house being shut up, Mr. Arundel became again the inhabitant of the Temple, then fast relapsing into the silence and solitude which may have prevailed there before the Knights Templar moved thither from their lodgings in Holborn in 1184.

"John Claxton," said Philip, one morning, as the two were standing on the stone coping of the garden, that is to say, on the edge of the river, and paying as much attention to the prohibition against smoking in that sacred place as was being paid to Lord Palmerston's

edict to the same effect by a dozen factory chimneys on the opposite bank, "John Claxton, what a fix I am in. That Mrs. Spencer will never go out of town. She has a new story every day about her intentions and her hindrances, but all ends in nothing."

"Spex it's a case of impecuniosity," said Mr. Claxton, kicking a pebble into a barge.

"I suppose it may be," said Philip. "I wish one saw any way to remove that excuse, because the idea of their staying on where they are is perfectly abominable."

"They meaning Miss Spencer. Why don't her old friends at St. Oscars ask her there?"

"I dare say. Thank you," said Philip.

"Shropshire is a very rich county, and comprises every variety of pleasing scenery. It is divided in two by the noble river Severn, and has a fine lake, called Ellesmere, and some minor ones. Its mineral wealth is large, and its industrial products are various. The inhabitants, though said to be proud, are affable, clean, and hospitable, and the women are proverbially beautiful. Shrewsbury cakes are a delicacy of repute, and Shrewsbury clock has been immortalized by the sweet swan of Avon. The Wrekin is—"

"Do hold your clack. I want you to tell me whether you see any sort of way to move the old lady."

"Love ought to be ready with stratagem. That feat about the champagne was well enough, but it is a pity you threw the trick away, instead of keeping it for a more important purpose."

"So I would, but the fact is that Mrs. Spencer had threatened us with champagne, and I knew what abomination would come in from the nearest hostelry. So in self-defence, I lost the bet to her husband, and paid it."

"Spex it would be rather barefaced to try it again—to lose a twenty-pound note to Mr. Bob, and hand it to madam."

"Well, I would screw that out, and do it, but I have no faith in her applying it as I propose. She would fool it away, and remain just where she is."

"You have a good and, I am sure, a perfectly just appreciation of the relatives of your *fiancée*, Mr. Arundel."

"I don't consider them her relatives—they are mere interlopers. She shall see them for the last time on the day we are married. If Mr. Spencer were not her guardian, or Margaret were of age, the partnership should be dissolved sooner. What her father can have been thinking about to take her from the Cheritons, who are first-rate people, and hand her to the tender mercies of the Spencers, is a mystery to me. However, we'll rectify that blunder."

"But for that blunder you would never have seen her, you know."

"That's true, perhaps. All's for the best. Well but, Jack, to revert to the question. How can we drive Mrs. Spencer out of Gower-street for a couple of months?"

"Where would you send her?"

"What does it matter? The quieter the place the better."

"Fewer people to remark upon that hideous wide-awake of yours when you follow them down."

"Be serious, can't you, John Claxton? Levity out of place is a great bore. Besides, you're a good fellow, and you know how miserable I am about it."

"Well, but see. The lady can't leave her house. Everything would go to the bad, and Robert Spencer would have pewter-pots in the drawing-room, and a ruffian bawling after them at the door in the morning. This, you must see, is reasonable."

"I say, would you mind taking the drawing-room floor and stopping there? You could give a look to the house generally, and then they could get away. I'll stand the expenses."

"Confound your impudence. Do you want *me* to stay in Gower-street in October?"

"It would be deuced friendly thing in you, Jack."

"Friendship's a holy affair, but that's a trifle too exalted. I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll go and talk to her about her health, and frighten her with sanatory statistics and bills of mortality. She is fidgety on those points, and I could make her afraid to remain in town in the autumn. I dare say I could get a scrap into a country paper, about the neighbourhood of Bedford-square being peculiarly pestilential, and show it to her as a passage from the Board of Health's last report. But then, if Auntie has no funds, *cui bono*?"

"Why, let's see. It wouldn't be the thing for me to be lending her money, circumstanced as we are, but I'm certain she would take it from anybody, in a quiet way. Why shouldn't you lend her some?"

"Simply because I haven't got any."

"O, I'll find it, of course. You frighten her like fun, and if she brings out anything about the exchequer, try-on twenty pounds, and promise another when she is settled by the sea. She'll take it."

"Most people will take money, Philip. Do you know that I have remarked that weakness in the public?"

This notable and highly irreverent project, into which Mr. Claxton entered with considerable zeal, for he liked a little intrigue, and he disliked Mrs. Spencer, was carried into effect, but not with the exact effect intended by its contrivers. John Claxton got his terrifying paragraph printed, and made to look like a veritable extract from the Whitehall manifesto, and in the course of a call on Mrs. Spencer, he brought his machinery into play with so much success, that the lady, whose health was culpably good, became quite convinced of her danger, and was easily led to avail herself of the aid adroitly tendered by her insidious visitor. Mr. Claxton returned in quiet triumph to his principal.

Two days later this letter was received in King's Bench Walk.

"Bobbins's—The Fort, Margate."

"MY DEAR SIR,—For this relief, much thanks. Your most kind and friendly warning has not been thrown away, and I assure you that I feel quite another being in the fresh breezes of the Isle of Thanet. Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it, say I, while I can get pure atmosphere, and here the temple-hunting martyrs, as Banquo says, (have you any in your Temple?) do prove that the breath of

heaven is a nipping and an eager air. I left Gower-street in three hours after seeing you, and am very comfortably established in lodgings here, and should you be able to withdraw from your legal studies and come and find sermons in stones, and books in the running brooks of Kent, be sure that you will be welcome here. The house in Gower-street I have left in the charge of my dear Marguerita, who is quite competent to let the apartments if anybody calls, and generally to answer inquiries, and manage. Her poor uncle will, of course, be her protector during my absence, and I doubt not all will go on charmingly. I will not intrude on your time with a longer epistle, as the hour is almost come when I must render up myself to the wild and yeasty. With best regards to your elegant friend,

"Believe me, ever yours sincerely,

"HENRIETTA SPENCER."

"John Claxton, Esq."

The diplomatist was, as may be imagined, terribly discomfited on receiving this letter. But his wrath was mildness compared to the rage into which the elegant friend flew, when he found that their scheme had made matters ten times worse than they were before, and that he had sent an old woman, whom he began to abominate, to enjoy herself by the seaside, while his Margaret, his—the future Mrs. Arundel—was actually degraded to the position of having to answer anybody who might call, upon the price of lodgings, boot-cleaning, and the kitchen fire. How he strode up and down the chamber, and how rudely poor Fizz was flung into the bed-room for getting in the way, and how Biceps was snubbed for coming in with the *Times*. Alban Cheriton, on the bridge, might have been sublimer in his wrath, but he certainly was not stormier. I never print what is called an oath, except where it is necessary to the matter in hand, but I may record that during that day Mr. Arundel never mentioned the name of Henrietta Spencer, without coupling therewith a commination worthy of Vigilius Tapsensis, the African bishop, of whose creed St. Athanasius is held to take the credit.

"Render up herself to the wild and yeasty. What does the old idiot mean by that jargon?" said Philip, when he had become calm enough for gentle criticism on the letter.

"Going to bathe, I take it," said his friend. "Some muddle about the yeasty sea, and the wild and wasteful ocean."

"She go and bathe! An old hippopotamus. I hope she'll be drowned. I will be hanged if I don't. I hope she'll be drowned."

"I see no objection," said Claxton, "but it is of no use putting oneself in a fury. We have been signally beaten, that's flat. Now then to repair our defeat. Call that poor dog in, or you'll break his heart."

Fizz, who was sitting in a piteous attitude in the doorway, scrupulously obeying the order to keep in the bed-room, but with not half-an-inch between his humiliated nose and the carpet of the sitting-room, was on his master's knees in an instant, in an ecstasy of whine and forgiveness.

"The old woman must be brought up to town again instantly,"



said Philip. "I won't have Miss Spencer left to meet her aunt's snobbish acquaintances, and duns, and all that. Turn it over in your mind, while I go up and see how the land lies."

It was with very considerable satisfaction that he found, on arriving in Gower-street, that another friend had preceded him. This was Mr. Keckling, who no sooner became aware that Mrs. Spencer had gone off, leaving her house in the care of her niece, than he came round, expressed much anger, and instantly took all the vacant rooms in the house.

"But of what use will they be to you?" said Margaret. "You have such a very nice house of your own."

Mr. Keckling made no answer, but took out of the window a bill intimating that apartments were to be let there, tore it up, and threw it behind the gold shavings in the grate.

"That saves you from any visitors of that sort, my dear. Your aunt is a most thoughtless woman. I may say, that in some respects she is an objectionable woman. Yes, an objectionable woman. Now, who else is in the house?"

"The American gentleman, who has the drawing-room floors, is gone to France for a month, but they are to be kept for him. There are two young artists in the attics."

"Give them notice to quit; I want the attics. Stop, I'll do it myself. I'll make them a little present to clear out this very evening."

This was easily managed, the rather that the young artists in question were in artistic arrear with their rent, and were in terror lest the heavy foot ascending to their rooms was that of an enemy with views upon their scanty property. Poor fellows, they were agreeably surprised at the apparition of a kindly-mannered old gentleman in a velvet skull-cap, who explained to them as courteously as he would have done to two young noblemen, that it would oblige him if they would resign their chambers, and who, in a good-natured paternal way, told them that the rent was of no consequence, they might send it at Christmas, or when they pleased. He did more—he actually bought an abominable landscape of one of them for four pounds, thus enabling them to depart in joy and glory.

The house was entirely cleared, except of the servants, and Mr. Keckling's next step was to request Miss Spencer to prepare herself to go home with him.

"You are most kind," said Margaret, "but I gave my aunt a promise to remain and take care of her house."

"But it is my house now, Miss, and I don't want you in it. In fact, I don't like you, and you shan't live here. I turn you out. Now, my love, see about your bonnet."

Margaret, however, was not to be decoyed from what she deemed her duty, although Mr. Keckling represented to her that she could do her aunt no good by remaining, that he would be answerable for everything, and that he would even send in a dependent of his own to keep watch and ward. She had given her word, and until it should be released by her aunt, she must keep to her compact.

"It is excessively tiresome of you, my dear child, but you are per-

fectly right," said Mr. Keckling; "and as you wont come and live with me, I shall come and live with you."

And when Philip called, he found the kind old Russian merchant established in the house, with a couple of his own servants, and his own white cat, fetched in an express cab to make Mr. Keckling feel himself thoroughly at home. Margaret was relieved of every care, her old friend taking the entire administration into his own hands, and (to the extreme dissatisfaction of Mrs. Spencer's slovenly menials) organizing a system of order such as had never pervaded the house under Henrietta Spencer's vacillating sway.

This arrangement gave Philip Arundel considerable consolation, but it did not carry out his plans. He expressed to Mr. Keckling his surprise that Mrs. Spencer had not taken her niece to the sea-side.

"She's an objectionable woman, sir," said the Russian merchant, "but I am not going to let my little friend, Miss Margaret, suffer by her foolishness. I am very fond of Miss Margaret, sir, and if I were twenty years younger, I should ask her whether M.K. would not make as pretty a monogram as M.A., which we have seen experimentally drawn on a certain card. However, you need not be unhappy. I have written to Mrs. Spencer, demanding *carte blanche* to do as I please about her niece's residence, and there are some very good reasons why I should receive it by to-morrow's post."

"And what are your plans, sir?" said Philip, eagerly.

"Well, sir, if they interest you, I don't mind revealing them. I have had the pleasure of showing a good deal of London to Miss Margaret, and I propose to have the pleasure of showing her a little of the country. I mean, as soon as ever she pronounces herself ready, to take her to Ryde, where I have written to secure a house."

"Capital," said Philip.

The place was exactly that in which he had wished Margaret to pass the autumn, and here she would be under the best of guardians, and out of the way of the Spencers, and all their snobbishness. So thought Mr. Arundel, and though he did not convey his feelings in those exact words when Margaret came into the room, smiling that happy smile of hers, he speedily made her understand how satisfied he was with the scheme.

"It all depends upon aunt's releasing my promise, you know, Philip," she said, with pretended gravity.

"If the permission does not come to-morrow morning, I shall telegraph to her that the house is on fire," said Arundel.

"I shall telegraph something much more to the purpose," said Mr. Keckling, with a quiet look, and a nod. "But it will come, unless she misses the post."

Of course she missed the post—the Henrietta Spencer class have a special gift for doing that, under circumstances which would almost make it seem impossible. But the leave and licence subsequently came in a parcel, with something from Prospero's speech to Ariel, when giving it liberty to go where it pleased, and a hope, that merrily, merrily Meg would live now, under the blossom that hung on the bough."

"Orange-blossom, one of these days," whispered Philip.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNCLE ROBERT.

THERE was one person who to a certain extent was attached to the Gower-street establishment, but whose voice was seldom heard therein to much purpose, and, indeed, when Mrs. Spencer was there, seldom heard at all. This was the lord and master of the house, Robert Spencer.

Mr. Keckling did not like him. I do not think that though the Russian merchant had in other days admired Henrietta, he preserved any grudge against the fortunate man who had become the possessor of her ample charms. But Mr. Keckling had been a man of business, and though it now pleased him to spend his money with unbusiness-like liberality, he preserved some of his old instincts, and he disliked an unlucky man, and an untidy man, and an untruthful man, and Robert Spencer was something of all three. The old merchant was, nevertheless, occasionally kind to Robert, and upon leaving Gower-street he felt a compassion for the seedy, helpless, cheery creature who was thus to be left to himself in hot London, while all his "belongings" were in pleasanter homes. And before going he demanded Robert Spencer's presence, and requested his acceptance of a ten-pound note, in case he felt any inclination to run down to Margate for a day or two and see his wife, an inclination which, if Robert had it, he had too much manly self-denial to indulge, while he could turn his windfall to a great deal pleasanter account.

"I thank you, Mr. Keckling," said Mr. Spencer, "and I assure you in the frankest manner that the money is extremely acceptable; for, although I have, of course, the means of travelling as I please, I feel it due to this establishment to withdraw from it as little capital as possible in its present incipient stage of progress."

"I hope it will be luckier than it has been," said Mr. Keckling. "System is what is wanted. Nothing can succeed without system."

"I assent to the proposition, sir, but must animadvert upon it to the extent of remarking that there are good systems and bad ones. For instance, the system represented by this piece of paper which you have been good enough to place in my hands is an extremely bad and fallacious one."

"The Bank! What's the matter with the Bank? I always get my dividends."

"The whole theory and practice of the Bank of England, sir, is utterly false and wrong, or I should not now be in the position which I occupy. Suppose that this money-jobbing company, sir, when I was in my difficulties, had discounted my bills instead of returning them. What then?"

"Then you would have muddled away the money, and three months afterwards you would have dishonoured the bills."

"You are a noble-minded man, sir, but you take a mere mercantile view of these questions, not a large one, based upon the inherent rights of citizenship, and buttressed by the eternal principles of philanthropy."

"If I had taken such views, I should have been in no position to offer you a ten-pound note, my dear Mr. Spencer. Good day to you."

Mr. Robert Spencer, being thus suddenly placed in the possession of a sum, not the tenth part of which had his lady allowed him to appropriate, at one time, for many a long day, was extremely puzzled to decide how he should enjoy himself. He first turned his note into gold, and some of the gold into silver, and some of the silver into stimulants of inhalation and imbibition, which, consumed in the most novel and audacious way in the parlour (in defiance of a not very respectfully worded warning from big Ann to her *soi-disant* master), aided him to a gentle slumber on the sofa.

His earlier visions are not upon record, but he stated that, hunting in dreams (like the clown-husband to whom Mr. Tennyson so cruelly married Cousin Amy), he had hunted the Governor of the Bank of England into a corner of The Parlour, and was proving to him that the less likely he considered a man to take up his bills, the more, upon philanthropic principles, he was bound to discount them; when the Governor, with an entire abrogation of mercantile dignity and propriety, took a small fiddle out of a bullion chest, and began to play a hornpipe. Mr. Spencer was so disgusted at this informality, that he grappled with the perpetrator, and, in trying to bring him to a sense of the fitness of things, fell off the sofa; woke, but still heard the Governor's hornpipe. The sounds did not proceed from a mere fiddle of the mind, but from a vile, material instrument, that was being played in the kitchen.

Mr. Spencer was not endowed with such authority in the house, that he could effectually resent this impertinence on the part of his wife's servants; and therefore, he deemed it best to take no notice of the noise, and to be supposed not to have heard it. To this policy of compromise he adhered for a short time, when the fiddle ceased, and a piteous cry from a child was heard. Then came blows, and entreaties for mercy.

This, Robert Spencer, who (foolish fellow though he was) had very kindly instincts about him, could not stand, and he hurried down the lower stairs—much more familiar to him than such parts of a house usually are to its master—and dashed at the door of the room whence the noises proceeded.

"What's all this?" he demanded of Ann, who confronted him at the threshold, and would have closed the door in his face, had he been a second later.

"O, nothing," said Ann; looking half-inclined to hustle her master from the place. But he looked a little too angry for her to risk insolence, and he pushed past her.

A little girl, of seven or eight years old, dressed in a very short frock, which, though crumpled and shabby, had once been handsome, was sitting on the ground, rubbing her legs as if to ease them of pain, and with large tears rolling down her cheeks. Her hair was tied up in a small net. The child was not pretty, at least, crouching there in her poverty and misery she was not, but she looked very helpless and much to be pitied. In the kitchen were, in addition to the big Ann,

another woman, of slatternly appearance, and a low-looking fellow in an old shooting-coat and a cloth cap. He was a little drunk, and his coarse features and bleared eyes looked particularly offensive to Robert Spencer, as the man stared impudently at him.

"Who are these people, Ann?" Mr. Spencer said, with some determination of manner.

"Friends of mine," was the saucy reply.

"And she's a friend of ours," said the other woman, still more saucily. And the fellow in the cap laughed at the speech.

"Who was beating that child?" demanded Spencer.

Nobody replied.

"Who was beating you, my dear?" he asked of the little creature herself, at whom the woman instantly held up a clenched hand, which awed her to silence, and she went on rubbing her slender legs.

"The gent seems curious," said the man, jeeringly, and taking off his cap and looking into it. "I wonder nobody makes a civil answer to a civil question."

This time the woman laughed out, and a grin came over Ann's features. Robert Spencer felt something of the degradation of his social position, but at the moment he felt more of anger at the ill-treatment of the child.

A policeman passed, and Spencer, for once in his life, acted promptly and well. He opened the area door, and called to the officer:

"Go and let him in, Ann," he said.

"We don't want no police here," was his servant's reply, "and them as does may fetch 'em themselves."

Robert Spencer would have gone up for the purpose, but saw a signal given by Ann, and remembered that there was a back door to the garden, through which she could have hurried her friends as he ascended the stairs. His brains must have been improved by what he had taken, for it immediately occurred to him to make his own prisoners, and he retreated, drew the kitchen door close, and locked it before the party saw his plan. He then hurried upstairs, and admitted the officer.

Ann, with more zeal than discretion, had immediately seized the poker, and sought to force the door open, and had partly succeeded when the policeman came down with her master.

"Best keep quiet with that thing," said the officer, in a persuasive voice. "Uncommon like burglary!"

He opened the door, and Ann, frantic at this new self-assertion on her master's part, rushed forward, but was repressed by the officer. The others were old hands, and knew better than to show the least sign of resistance or discomposure. The child was still rubbing her legs, and did not seem to take much interest in the scene.

"I heard this child screaming under blows, and coming down, I find these persons with my servant, and all are grossly insolent. They are here without my sanction, and I presume for dishonest purposes. I give them all in charge. There is valuable property in the house, and the servant has no doubt informed them that the family is away."

The policeman inspected all parties with a moveless countenance, and then he said—

"I can take 'em. But this is what it is. Your servant's a bad one, and there's been a High upon her for a good bit. These two aint in it."

"But somebody was brutally ill-treating the child. I'll know who, and I'll have that somebody punished."

"Who hit you?" demanded the officer.

"Yes, you'd better speak," said Ann, warningly. The child looked up, but made no answer.

"It was her," said the policeman. "I see her whacking of it with a whip one evening before. A High has been on her."

"Lock her up. If you are sure about the others, it's another story."

"I could lay my hand on 'em any time, eh, master," said the officer, addressing the man. He simply winked. The woman remarked—

"Hope you'll have no call to it, sir."

"That child shall not go away to be more ill-treated. I am not in the habit of swearing, policeman, but I assert to you distinctly that I will be damned if it shall," said Mr. Spencer, grandiloquently, but in thorough earnest.

"If the gent wishes Sue to stop to tea with him, we are agreeable," said the man, with great gravity, "but hopes he wont keep her up too late, because that is bad for her precious health. We'll send the carriage for her at nine precisely."

Assuming permission to leave, the man and his companion slunk from the kitchen rather stealthily, though under the eyes of Spencer and the officer. The latter listened to their footsteps as they went along the hall, and shook his head.

"He couldn't help looking into the parlour, but he'll touch nothing."

The officer was wrong, for the fellow took a very sufficient pull at what Spencer had left in the spirit-bottle, and then they departed.

"Now, young woman, if you're ready."

"What am I took for?" said Ann, affecting indignation.

"When they look in your box, they'll know," said the officer. "You know all about it. What's the odds? If you hadn't welted the kid, it might have been to-morrow; as you did welt her, it's to-day. Come along."

"To be took through such a fool as that, who daren't say his nose is his own when his wife's in the house," cried the prisoner, in a great passion. "I'd like to smash him." And she really seemed to be speaking the truth.

"No matter who it is when a High's upon you," said the officer, who evidently regarded this proposition as conclusive, for he took up a shawl that was lying on the dresser, and a black bonnet that had been deposited for safety in a soup-tureen, and very unceremoniously investing Ann therewith, he marched her upstairs, and away.

"Now will you speak to me, my poor child?" said Robert Spencer, kindly.

"Don't slash me any more," said the child, looking up imploringly at him; "I can't bear it, I can't, indeed. I danced as well as I could, I did, indeed. My poor legs are covered with weals. Don't hurt me, please."

Robert Spencer fairly burst into tears

## CHAPTER XIV.

BY THE SAD SEA WAVES.

THE power of loving, and the power of making love, I take to be two very distinct gifts, seldom found united in one individual. They resemble, respectively, the power of thinking and the power of talking, and one would not be much surprised to find that the number of people who can make love without feeling it is proportionate to that of the number of people who can (and will) talk without thinking. But do not let us be savage, do not let us be dissatisfied with these arrangements of nature. Bless us all, what sort of a world would it be if nobody sighed and whispered unless he had a passion at his heart, and if nobody questioned and answered unless he had a brain in his head? What would become of society in general, and Sir Cresswell Cresswell in particular?

Should you ask me whether our elegant Philip Arundel belonged to the first mentioned class, or the second—whether he had a perception of love's mysteries, or only the faculty of talking impressively about them—I should answer, I should tell you, that I really do not know. Let us speak of our man as we found him. A very pleasing-looking gentleman, whom I had the pleasure of hearing Mrs. Charles Kean designate as a tame snake, gave, later in that evening, a definition of love which certainly does not set out the passion Miss Spencer had inspired in Mr. Arundel. His love, assuredly, was not made up of sighs and tears, humbleness, purity, trial, and the other articles in the tame snake's inventory. Should you ask me whether he had become, under the magic of passion, a mystery to himself—whether he alternately felt that his own nature was changed, and that all that was around him had changed its nature and value—whether he seemed to himself to have suddenly sounded the depth of his own being, and to have found himself miserably shallower and grandly deeper than ever before—whether he became at once the most determined and the most purposeless of Heaven's creatures—whether he was at intervals proud of himself and intensely thankful to the Providence that had led him to a glorious happiness, and steeped in self-abasement and profane in his repining that he could but have a Pisgah-top view of a bliss which he would never be worthy to attain—whether all the world held but two objects as a centre for its revolution, and of these two objects he was sometimes the one that was triumphant and ecstatic, while the other was all sweetness and devotion, sometimes the one that was rejected, miscomprehended, despised, while the other stood apart, a statue of coldness and pride—whether a strong man's heart leaped like a girl's at the sound of a voice or the rustle of a dress, and a strong man's nerves played him false when they should have been true, and yet again heart and nerves were at times more courageous and more trusty than he had ever before found them—whether intense thought about himself (what fool wrote that love forgot self for another?) became elevated from vanity to worship by

the all-absorbing desire to please, and to please worthily, and whether in the very endeavour to be worthier he was checked by fear lest he should by any change lose the vantage ground he had been so favoured as to gain—whether a Presence was ever before him, and around and about him, pervading thought, care, hope, and dream, and was perhaps felt the least when the living and real deity was breathing, and blushing, and smiling before him—whether all these are among the signs that love delivers in the case of our friend, I should answer, I should tell you, in the words of the courtier of whom his Queen asks the trifling question whether there are not twenty thousand giants in the back garden, “Madam, shall I tell you what I am going to say? I do firmly believe that there is not one.”

But, *en revanche*, and I imagine that a very large class of young females would consider the revenge very ample, nobody could have made love more pleasantly and tenderly than Philip. You will probably suppose that he was not very long in following Margaret and her Russian merchant to the Isle of Wight. And there he played the tame snake as naturally as if he had all his life worn the garb of that crawling harlequin. Love-making by the seaside—presuming that you have luxurious weather during the day, and a luxurious home to be resorted to about seven o’clock, (I exclude all neediness and squalor from the picture)—is, or suppose I say must be, the most refined and delightful of amusements. Who is that growling because I write amusements, and reminding me that love-vows are solemn things, and that they make an avenue or vista, as it were, up to the altar of Hymen—no, not Hymen (frivolity again), but of the Church of England? I repeat, amusements, and am fortified with a quotation from Isaac Watts,—

Religion never was designed to make our pleasures less.

This amusement, then, as practised by our Margaret and her lover, was conducted somewhat in the following fashion. Mr. Keckling, like a wise man, disliked to get up too early in the morning; and as Philip, like a wise man, disliked to go to bed too early in the night, the arrangement that brought Mr. Arundel to Anemone Lodge, Ryde, to breakfast at ten o’clock, suited both gentlemen well, and everything suited gentle Margaret. I dare say that she rose three hours sooner, and read in her Bagster’s Bible, and looked out the references, and perhaps kept a little diary; or painted a few seaweeds from the damp life, or worked a flower or so into certain slippers—a species of man-trap in which when a woman gets you by the foot she thinks she has you; or re-strung her bracelet-beads on new elastic; or made some nice little use of her time: but Miss Spencer did not appear until the proper date, and then she looked so fresh, and so cool, and so pretty, that I suppose she must have washed her face and hands again, and smoothed her hair once more, just before coming down to breakfast. That meal, with its seaside variations, in respect of which Philip was strong, and could preach like St. Antony over the fish, occupied an agreeable hour; and then Mr. Arundel went down to the clubhouse, looked at the papers, smoked his cigar, and saw that a boat which he had chartered for the season had its provisions on board. Then he returned



to fetch Margaret and her friend; and it was pleasant to see his attention to the old gentleman, and how carefully Philip helped him down the slimy steps from the pier to the boat. Then came a long sail, if the wind were fair, or a merry day of fishing, if that were decided on. In the former case, the way that Margaret was enshrined in the pleasantest corner, and covered with the choicest rugs and wraps, and begged to note all noteworthy matters on sea or shore, and reminded of a line from Walter Scott, when a sea-bird came brushing the white wave with her whiter wing, and carefully guarded from the sail in tacking, and generally watched with a sedulous but not fussy care, was doubtless as pleasant to the gentle girl as it was intended to be. But when anchor was cast for sport, and the lines were got out, and the party went busily to war upon the fish, how carefully Margaret's tackle was attended to, how her bites were pointed out, and how exultingly her soles and whittings were hauled in for her. Mr. Keckling enjoyed the thing like a schoolboy, and would let nobody interfere with him, even to the impaling the ugly worms, but fished from the bow, chalking on the gunwale a mark for every capture; so that Philip had nothing to do but to mind Miss Spencer. And he minded her very well.

On other days they had drives, and visited country churches, and saw prospects; and sometimes they walked, but not often, for Mr. Keckling had an objection to that kind of locomotion. Or they sat by the sea, and talked, and were sometimes made thoughtful by the incessant warning of the eternal voice, but not often, for you know that their united ages would not have made fifty years. Why should the sea-voice have anything for the young but music—be aught but a song without words, a caressing song, reminding them of happy hours of sunshiny leisure, promising them as happy hours in summers to come? Perhaps such hours are coming—if not, why be told that it is not so? Let the ear be older and the heart be harder before the sea-music forms itself into the stern words which he who hears not at some hour of his life dies as those whom the gods love—or is but a stone on the sea-shore.

The days were pleasant, pleasanter, perhaps, the evenings, for after Mr. Keckling's hospitality had done its duty (and there is one brief period in the life of most men when they do not care how soon they come to the coffee) there was the quiet hour or so in the drawing-room. The Russian merchant liked his nap after dinner, and our young couple had been bred up with too clear a sense of the reverence due to age to think of disturbing his rest by loud conversation. Now, in order to speak low and yet be heard, it was necessary that they should not sit very far apart. Therefore they did not sit far apart. So went the hours until Philip Arundel withdrew to his hotel, or, at least, from Anemone Lodge, for I believe that he observed the Christian duty of recollecting every night the events of the day, and pondering over the same, and this process took him some time and several Havannahs.

He had some sentiment about him, just a pleasant, graceful quantity, enough to keep lip and eye from laughing at a wrong time—nay, a little more. It was the kind of sentiment that is evolved only

when one is quite comfortable in one's own person and circumstances, and one has leisure to be gently sympathetic, where the object of sympathy is not ungraceful or disagreeable. This is a not uncommon gift, and on the strength of it, and in society where all is refined and rose-coloured, many persons get credit for having very feeling hearts. It is that species of sympathy which has no idea of being sympathized with, and crystallizes at once if anybody else takes the liberty of taking it for real feeling. *Néanmoins*, it is as well to have it as not, if you have not the real article. I believe that a poet's line creating a melancholy image of a pretty and forsaken woman, buried with her broken heart in some lonely country grave, would have touched Philip Arundel. He would have given the image material association with some one he had known, and liked, and having thus incarnated the thought it would have brought a tear to his eye. To the unwritten poetry of the life of a plain woman, the mother of a lot of coarse brats, for whose sake and that of a rough husband she was content to toil and moil for thirty years, and finally drop, uncared for in illness, and unthanked in death, into a grim hole in a crowded London churchyard, I equally believe our Philip would have been as deaf as becomes a gentleman. He would take home a flower that Margaret had given him, and set it up in some water, and think, as he gazed upon it, how gentle, and yet full of meaning, had been her voice when she looked up in his face and gave him the gift. He would probably say Darling. He would probably think what little present he should buy for her for next day, and with what pretty words he should present it. But inasmuch as such meditation would most likely take place at night, when he was imbibing his final refreshment, the romance of the flower would in no degree prevent the reality of the brandy-and-water from being present to his mind, nor preserve the waiter from a proper reproof if the latter fluid were not as hot or as cold as Mr. Arundel desired. Now I have read, somewhere, in southern story, of a man who, being in love, received a flower from his mistress, and thereupon went into a church—he was, to be sure, a benighted papist—and, falling on his knees before the Lady of the White Lilies, did remain for the space of fourteen hours, asking her by what good deed of his life he had ever merited such unsurpassed and overwhelming bliss.

As for Margaret, she had made up her mind that she was loved, and having, with all the honesty of her nature deserved that satisfaction by giving her whole heart to Philip, she was about as happy as it is possible for a good, pretty, healthy girl to be. She grew prettier every day. She had been accustomed to fresh country air, and the sojourn in town, with all its excitement, had done her little good; and the great excitement of all, the discovery that her happiness was in the keeping of another, had for a time paled her cheek, and perhaps a little dimmed her bright eyes. But here she was with every advantage, the sea-breezes, a pleasant home, a fatherly friend, and a recognised and devoted lover, and her face resumed its beauty of contour and colour, and if her voice remained something less elastic than in mere girlhood, the change was not wrought by aught of regret, but by the thoughtfulness which will come upon the cheeriest maiden when she counts



*Love in Idleness.*



the days between her liberty and the duties and dignities of matronhood. Perhaps never in her life, except once, did Margaret look so charming as on the sea-beach at Ryde. Margaret Spencer never did.

It need not be said that she had a correspondence to conduct—the girl who is not a good correspondent is either an idiot, or afraid of her spelling. Margaret had letters from St. Oscars, but though her cousin Bertha wrote, and a brief but affectionate note (not written without an effort) sometimes came from her uncle, her aunt Cheriton ceased to write as of old. But she had a new correspondent in her cousin Latimer, who, somewhat puzzlingly to her, began a series of letters which he kept up with unremitting vigour. Latimer Cheriton had completed his term of service to the profession, which to his father's surprise, and perhaps regret, he had selected, and having passed his examination, became duly qualified to promote peace on earth and goodwill among men as an attorney-at-law. The joyous, frank, merry Latimer, ever first in mischief and last in quarrel, had been everybody's favourite, and especially Margaret's, who as has been recorded, had taken his portrait in sportsman's gear, a costume in which he seemed more likely to distinguish himself than in the graver garb of attorney-craft. But the older we grow the more ready we are to coincide with an eminent philosopher whose dictum is enviously excluded from the sayings of the Seven, and who observed that nobody never knows nothing about nothing. Latimer Cheriton set himself to his work with all his might, and by the time that he was prepared to go into practice, the rule was once more found good which advises folk to be ready in case an opportunity turns up. It turned up for him in the shape of a little partnership in London, in which he would begin by taking only about two hundred a year, but from which, if he duly laboured at encouraging the natural instincts of his fellow-creatures, he would one day derive a handsome income. He, like Alban, had come to town with business objects, but did not contemplate a return, as Alban did, to his Shropshire home. He wrote capital letters to his cousin Margaret, and wrote them in such a clear, legible, lawyer's hand, that she read them all through. I have said that they puzzled her a little, but the puzzle was not in the writing. Margaret began to fancy that they were too affectionate.

It was a slight mistake on her part—I mean that she mistook the writer's intentions, if she interpreted them as uncousinly. But you must forgive her this sensitiveness. Was it not a loyal inspiration? I appeal to any well-disposed lady who has opened her heart to the conqueror thereof, whether she did not at once feel a call to mount new guns on the ramparts, to up with drawbridge and down with portcullis, to sentinel the castle with earnest vigilance, and to get the very best melted lead ready to pour down from the machicolations upon any daring assailant. You know that it was so, Madam, and I only hope that you would not now say to me, in extreme confidence, and with a slight sigh and slighter shrug of those white and matronly shoulders, that such extra-chivalry was rather thrown away. Next, I should like to ask, but this in fear and trembling, whether the most humble and modest young female person does not obtain, by an engagement, some little elevation in her own eyes. Does not she by

taking plight add (as Henrietta Spencer would say) one cupid to her stature? In a word, is she not a little prouder, even of so small a feat as having secured for life the obedience, purse, and devotion of so utterly worthless a thing as a Man? And, if I may, with tremor, assume that this is so, of course she sees a correspondingly increased liberty on the part of anybody who may think himself good enough to offer her homage. Margaret was the best girl in the world, but she had never thought of her cousin Latimer as a possible pretender to her hand, and now that he had taken his station in this life as an attorney in a small way, while she was troth-plight to a splendid young aristocrat, any demonstration on the part of Cousin Latimer was particularly objectionable.

Margaret, however, might have spared her little dissatisfaction, and answered her cousin as frankly and fully as he wrote to her. For he knew all about her engagement, and heartily approved it, so far as he had any knowledge of the circumstances, and it was because she was an engaged girl, and had been the friend of his boyhood, that Latimer poured out his merry, but just now earnest, heart in the epistles in question. He wanted some sympathy and encouragement, poor fellow, and was paving the way towards asking for it. For he had fallen into love, and wanted to marry upon his two hundred a year. When one of his letters made this known to Margaret, and the explanation was delayed all the longer by reason of her—I wont say mounting the high horse, but putting her pretty little foot for a moment into the stirrup, she was sitting in her bed-room, and by some miracle the mirror was so turned that she could see her face in it. She happened to look up, and saw a very sweet face, covered with a blush of anger with herself for having made the mistake, and then lighted up with a merry smile at the absurdity of the affair. That very night there crossed the water, for Latimer, a kinder letter than she had ever written him, and one which, I am sorry to say, put him in further heart for the mad and wicked project which I have said he had in view.

Letters came from Blanche and Geraldine, dated from country houses where they were being made much of, and where they wished Margaret was with them to share the lovely rides, moonlight boating on the lakes, consecration of a restored church (this was Miss Blanche, the Puseyite; it was the worldlier Geraldine who told how she had criticized the early English architecture, and pronounced it five-and-twenty minutes earlier than the date Mr. Scott assigned to it)—picnics in interesting ruins, a regatta, and the other diversions of the country. Nothing could be kinder than the letters, and even a little bit of feminine sauciness in one of them, the writer pretending to wonder on what part of the Continent Philip was spending his long vacation, was *ecrasé* in a tiny postscript, in which Margaret was warned that if she should happen to meet anybody looking like Demosthenes, walking on the sea-shore and declaiming, she was to be sure to give him some pebbles to put into his mouth, and ask him whether he had received any deputations lately.

Aunt Spencer did not write, for the opposite reason to that which caused the silence of Aunt Cheriton. The large Henrietta was too comfortable at Margate to care about writing, she being of the class

who seldom take up a pen for your amusement, but are very ready with it for their own advantage. Philip's money, with some additions that he had privately made *via* Mr. Claxton (for he was afraid that if the old girl, as he profanely called her, came up, she would be wanting Miss Spencer in London), was keeping her exceedingly well nourished at the Fort, and while she was happy, Mrs. Spencer never thought of anybody else. Her miracles of energy were performed when she was in evil case, or saw her way to a *coup*. One would say that she was the classic soldier who had lost his Belt, but one is afraid to think of such an article suited to her ample charms. Henrietta withheld from the lovers her advice and Shaksperianisms, and they bore with the privation as became them.

Altogether, Philip and Margaret had a happy time during that autumn at Ryde.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ANDROMEDA.

ONE evening in October, towards the close of a somewhat gloomier day than had lately been seen, Margaret and her old friend set out for a short walk, unaccompanied by Philip, who had been detained at his hotel by a business communication from Mr. Tarleton, the solicitor.

"I am perfectly certain," said Margaret, as they left Anemone Lodge, "that you are kind enough to come out only because you think the air is good for me. Now this is very naughty of you. I am sure you would rather sit in the armchair, and hear me read *Pendennis*. Would not you?"

"Do you know, Miss Opposition, that I happen to think the air good for me as well as for you."

"And so it is; but you do not like walking, and you walk for my sake," replied Margaret.

"Poor Philip!" said Mr. Keckling, good-naturedly, "what a pertinacious little wife he will have. Come, we will compromise. I want the air, and I don't want to walk, so we will go on the pier, if you have no further objection to raise, Miss."

There was some little bustle on the pier; the steamer had, shortly before, landed the passengers from London, and a cluster of porters was growling and grumbling to one another over the luggage, according to inexplicable custom, before proceeding to carry it away. There must be some superstition or religious observance connected with this ceremony of abusing the boxes, and the distances, and the business generally, prefatorily to delivering the luggage with promptness and fidelity. These old men of the sea occupy the position of Sinbad, and appear to be about as well satisfied with it as he was.

The companions waited for a few minutes, until the last great white covered trunk moved slowly off, looking in the gloom like a fat coffin under which the officiating undertaker was grunting a most

objectionable service; and then they went upon the pier, and listened to the water slapping and splashing around the piles, and to the steamer, which was moored, and gasping out its final sobs, and to the hearty laughter of some yachting men, who were striving to console themselves in the claret of the clubhouse for the fatigues and hardships of a voyage from Southampton, performed that afternoon. The lights of Portsmouth were beginning to be visible, and unromantic as was the notion of a set of gas-lamps in a dirty harbour town, the sparkle imparted a sort of neighbourly sensation not unwelcome on a dull evening.

One passenger, who held a small carpet-bag, had remained upon the pier, and was apparently in no hurry to leave it. He was leaning with his back against the rail at the end, and examining the general features of the town, which, like its opposite neighbour, was lighting up. As Margaret and Mr. Keckling approached, the stranger moved towards a corner as if to make way for them.

"Not a very cheerful look-out to-night," my dear, said Mr. Keckling.

"No," said Margaret; "but how fortunate we have been in our evenings up to this time."

There was not much in the words, but they fell upon an ear that eagerly caught the sounds of that voice.

"My cousin, Miss Spencer," said Alban Cheriton, advancing, and raising his hat. "We are always meeting unexpectedly."

Margaret was startled for a moment—more startled than there seemed any reason to be—and it was with somewhat less than her usual grace that she introduced Alban to Mr. Keckling. And when she had mastered herself, and began to consider whether she were really vexed or gratified that her cousin had come down to see her (that he had done so she was too certain of his feelings to doubt), she experienced certain contradictory sensations. Had it been Latimer, before his secret was revealed, she would simply have been displeased; but the grave, wise, stern Alban was another person to bring to her feet—and, good as she was, Margaret was a woman, and all the better for being one.

"Mr. Cheriton, of whom I have heard you speak. I am happy to make your acquaintance, sir. Have you friends in the island?"

"I hope to find that I have," said Alban.

"Well, when they can spare you, we shall expect to see you at Anemone Lodge—it lies over that way; but anybody will direct you to it, or, what will be better, come there with us presently."

"You are very kind," said Alban. "I will leave my carpet-bag at the hotel, and join you here in a few minutes."

"Margaret, my dear, it is a little colder here than I like, and yet I find the sea-air pleasant. I have a good mind to take a liberty with your cousin at once, and ask him to tell the porter at his hotel to go up and bring me my cloak."

"Let me fetch it myself, sir," said Alban, rather eagerly. "Anemone Lodge—I shall find it—at least, I think so, though I don't know Ryde," he added, possibly for reasons of his own.

At first Mr. Keckling would not hear of such a thing, but Mr.



Cheriton persisting, Margaret could hardly avoid offering to show him the way, and consequently the cousins departed together.

"You have never been in the Isle of Wight before, Alban?" said Margaret. "It is the most lovely place in the world, with every variety of scenery, and all within such easy reach. I had no idea that there could be anything so pretty, and I am sure you will be delighted when you have made a few rambles. This way," she went on, as they got to the land end of the pier, "and then to the right. There is a short way round by those trees, but in the gloom the walking is not quite so pleasant as the road, as the path is paved with large stones, and you can easily stumble over them."

If anybody knows why Miss Spencer was pleased to take the lead in this way, I do not. She was just about to begin again, with a rapid description of Black Gang Chine, when Alban said, stopping and touching her arm—

"One moment, Margaret, and then the more you can tell me of the Isle of Wight, and of anything else that interests you, the more I shall be pleased. But just a word. I have come down here to see you—"

"Of course, and it is very kind of you," said she, rather flutteringly.

"Hear me, dear Margaret. I want half an hour's conversation with you in private."

"There is nothing wrong, nothing amiss at St. Oscars?" asked Margaret. I am afraid that she knew quite well that there was not.

"Nothing—nothing wrong there, or elsewhere, I hope. But when can I speak with you?"

"Whenever you like, of course," said Margaret. "I assure you that Mr. Keckling was in earnest when he asked you to come to the Lodge; he is the kindest creature in the world, and the most hospitable, and he will be delighted to see you as often as it suits you to come."

"And so will you?"

"Why, what a question. Shall I not always be glad to see you, or anybody else out of the dear old house. But we must not keep Mr. Keckling waiting longer than we can help; let us walk on. Have you heard from aunt lately? I had a letter from Bertha about a week ago, but she did not tell me much St. Oscars news. I suppose she reserves that for you, so that when you return you may be quite aware of what your patients have been doing in your absence."

He calmly let her talk on, and then said—

"I will tell you all that I have heard, but first tell me when we can speak together."

"Any time, Alban. Come when you please. We are seldom at home much during the day, but always in the evenings. After sailing, or fishing, or anything of that sort, the charm of the quiet evening is very great. There, that is the Lodge, with the white gate—perhaps you would go on and get the cloak—it hangs in the Hall, as we proudly call it, and you are not to laugh at it."

Alban obeyed; but the servant, to whom he was a stranger, had read stories of well-dressed rogues obtaining coats under false pretences, and all his representations were in vain. Margaret, after

waiting several minutes, had to come up, and vouch for her cousin's respectability. At length the cloak was procured.

"We have been such a time," said Margaret, "that I think we must take the short road. I know it quite well, so you have only to follow me."

This little stratagem only partially succeeded. Alban could not renew the subject of a private interview, as they hastened down the rough path, but he obtained such an interview when they reached the pier, whence Mr. Keckling, feeling the cold increase, had departed.

"He has gone home the road way, expecting to meet us," said Margaret. "How tiresome."

"It is all well," said Alban. "We are alone here, Margaret, and out of hearing, and I will at once say what I came from London to say to you. You will listen to me, I am sure, if not for my sake, for that of the old house where you were the darling for so many years."

There was no escape for her now, and perhaps, on the whole, she wished that such an interview were past and over. Perhaps she was inclined to resist his gravity of appeal by a last attempt at levity—something about her not having seen so very many years—but, if so, the words died on her lip, and she replied in her old, sweet, quiet voice :—

"Alban, anything which you think you ought to say to me I am sure I ought to listen to."

"Then look here, Margaret."

He took her hand and led her, it was but a few steps, to the rail against which he had been leaning when they first saw him. He pointed to the sea, which was growing troubled and noisy. By the faint lights the crest of a wave could at intervals be seen, but gloom lay upon the mass of water, which they heard seething and wallowing in the darkness.

"There," he said. "In that mid channel, and within sight of happy homes, many a wretched fellow, wrecked, or fallen from his ship, has struggled in his agony, in the dreary night, and has at last gone down, with a scream, or with a prayer. Can you not imagine him in the grasp of the savage waves, as they fling him one to another, until one of them opens, that the dead man may sink through."

"Alban, why paint so dreadful an image? Such things have been; but why not, if we are to speak of them, why not imagine what must also have happened many and many a time—the poor creature's cry heard, the answering shout bidding him keep heart and hope, the strong fishermen pulling out bravely to his help, and then dragging him on board, and ten minutes afterwards the wife sobbing for joy and clutching him to her heart?"

"God bless you for the words and for the thought, Margaret," he said, passionately. "O, if they were an omen. Listen to me. The drowning man, in his last struggle, as he wildly tries to heave himself from the water to get a last look at the home he is never to see again, that man is myself."

"Alban!"

"Myself, I repeat. And as that poor wretch will not go down to the deep without one last struggle and cry, I will not bear to see all that I covet in life and in death, torn from me without an effort, wild, unmanly, I care not what it seems, to save myself from misery."

There was a pause.

"You are silent, because you understand me, and are too frank and too true to affect doubt.

"I might think I understood you, Alban," said Margaret, "but that you use words far too strong for anything of an earthly nature."

"You think so," said Alban, more calmly. "I should see hope in that, for your heart has never been really awakened to what it should learn, if you can deem any words strong enough for the heart's emotion. Margaret, you do not need to be told—I know you do not—that you have been the one idol of my life, the one being whom I have ever loved, loved with an intensity that has been my deadliest enemy. In the earnestness of my love—you know that it is so—in my consciousness of its fervour and truth, I have neglected and despised the wisdom of the world and the world's game, and I have forfeited, perhaps for ever, the treasure for which I would have given every hope and happiness of life. All this you know, Margaret. I have been a miserable, proud, self-asserting fool, and I am justly punished—no, not justly, for such a punishment is too bitter for any wrong—but I am fearfully punished for my folly. Even now, pleading to you as that sailor we have spoken of might have uttered his last prayer, I feel that I am speaking a language to which I am unused, and that smooth-tongued men, without a thousandth part of what I feel, may tell you in far more eloquent words, that which is a lie from their lips, but from mine is the holiest truth; I swear it, Margaret—I swear it. Will you not answer me," he said, in an imploring tone.

"What would you have me say, dear Alban?" said Margaret, agitated, but retaining her self-possession. "The past is past, our future lot is fixed for us; and you, Alban, are not to be told that all is for the best."

"No," he cried, "I am not. Do not mock my heart and your own with falsehood. It is not so. All is for the worst. But I have no one to blame, to scorn, to curse, but myself. I had my destiny in my own hands, and I marred it. When you were day after day with me, when your heart was your own,—no, that is your own now, but when your fancy, which is now touched by the outside graces of a worthless worldling——"

Poor Alban! No need for him to declare himself a novice in the art of pleading to woman. Margaret's pride and her love both flew to the rescue of her lover's good name.

"Alban," she said. "I may hear anything you wish to say about yourself, but I am not—I mean, that it would not be right in me to hear anything against another. You cannot wish to give me pain."

"O, you are right, quite right," he said, with bitterness. "It is against the rules of the world that I should even warn one who has been my sister——"

"Who will be your sister still, your attached and grateful sister, if you will let her, Alban."

"I will not. Do not sport with me," said Alban, vehemently. "Nay," he said, seeing she almost recoiled from his passion, "forgive me, forgive me, I am rough, I am brutal; but, Margaret, it is the last struggle for life. Margaret, I will speak more calmly. I know that you have engaged yourself to—to this young gentleman. It is impossible—nay, hear me on—impossible that your earnest and beautiful nature, your fine intellect, your warm heart can have really been led astray by anything that he can offer. He can never appreciate you, and you are dooming yourself to a life of sorrowful regrets and humiliation. I will not preach to you—perhaps much religion that we have been taught is a fable—I have thought so since I came into sorrow—but let me counsel you. O, forget me, if you will, forget that I shall ever be ready, honoured, proud to lay at your feet the triumphs of a life that will be no ignoble one if you will bless it—forget that—but wait, pause, and do not madly surrender a priceless treasure, like yourself, into hands utterly unworthy to possess it. Ah! you have heard me now, Margaret, and chide me if you will, but what I have said will abide in your memory."

"I fear it will," said Margaret; "but I will try and forget all except that a cousin was unkind without meaning to be so."

"A cousin," repeated Alban, bitterly. "Even a friend were too warm a word."

"That is a sacred word," replied Margaret, with dignity, "and a title that should be earned before it is given. Is it a friend's part to say much that you, Alban, have said to me, knowing what you know?"

"Yes," he said, almost fiercely, "it is a friend's part. I have warned you against marrying a frivolous profligate, and the day may come when you will recal this pier, and this sea, and wish that you had listened to a friend. Ah, you are going, and going in anger. Thus it is that I have pushed you from me all my life, when I would have given my life to take you to my heart."

Margaret was now too much offended to spare the stroke.

"Alban, after what has passed, I suppose that you will scarcely come to Anemone Lodge. You will not wish to meet its most constant guest, almost inmate, of whom you have chosen to speak so wrongfully."

He laughed, under his voice, but scoffingly, and justly earned a second blow. She continued, calmly,

"Perhaps it is right to say, as it may put you at peace with yourself as to much of the past, that long before my coming to London I knew that you had been thinking favourably of me, and as it was quite impossible that under any circumstances I could reward your condescension as you might wish, I begged Bertha to save us any unpleasant scenes. I hoped that she would have succeeded."

"This is our mild and gentle Margaret," said Alban, "because a word is said in disparagement of —"

"Of her affianced husband. Alban, would you speak more gently if any one in your presence insulted the character of your affianced wife? If you would, I beg your pardon."

"You have not mixed with the world in vain, Margaret. Already you have learned its sarcasms, and its heartlessness. You are prudently arming yourself for the sort of battle into which you are so eager to go."

"You do me great injustice, Alban, but it must be something very sad indeed that Margaret Spencer ought not to forgive in a child of the house where some of her happiest days were spent."

"You are spending happier days now—here. You dare not deny it?"

"Why should I deny it?" said Margaret, quietly. "I hope that you, Alban, will live to see days as happy. Won't you take my hand? Let me speak, and then perhaps you will. I have for years admired your genius, Alban, and your force of character, and though I have always felt that I am not the kind of wife whom you ought to seek, the woman you choose will be a proud and happy one. Do not be angry with me for knowing myself better than you could do, but think kindly of your sister and playfellow, and wish her well. Won't you take my hand?"

Nothing could be sweeter than the voice in which she spoke, or kinder than the manner she adopted. Perhaps there were some tears in her eyes, but if so the darkness, now complete, prevented his seeing them.

"If she speaks so to me, whom she cares nothing for, and who have offended her, what treasures of fondness she must have for *him*," was the thought that traversed Alban's whole being, like one of the fiery serpents of the Mosaic story.

"We must try to meet no more," he said, "or we shall learn to hate one another."

He caught her in his arms, touched her cheek with his lips, and was hastening from the pier, when it suddenly occurred to him, amid his excitement, that to leave her in the darkness, and in such a situation, was scarcely the course even for a rejected and outraged lover.

"I will send a servant to you," he exclaimed. "Pray remain a moment or two."

But as he reached the gate, he saw a tall figure hurrying up, and his eye, quickened, as his ear had been earlier in the evening, instantly made out Philip Arundel, who, not noticing him, rushed towards the end of the pier. A little earlier and it had been a new case of Perseus arriving to deliver Andromeda, by the sea, from a furious monster.

It is just to Alban to say that he waited in the gloom to see Margaret come off, duly escorted, and that then he was seen no more by any of the party at the Lodge.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### MR. SPENCER AFTER DARK.

"AND why were we up so late last night that we had to eat our breakfast in our bed this morning?" replied unto a child the present writer.

"O, I went to a lecture with Miss Middleton, and it was about the Druids. Do you know that they used to make a great brass image of their God, and make it red hot, and put little babies in its hands, and they fell off into a fire and were burned, and the music played that they might not be heard crying. Isn't it a good thing that there are no Druids now?"

We left Robert Spencer downstairs bemoaning over the pitiful plaint of the little girl whose ill-treatment had aroused him into unwonted action. As soon as his compassion had found its first vent, and he had assured her of his protection, he brought her up into the parlour, and desired her to remain there while he got her some tea, in quest of which he proceeded to ransack. But the moment the good-natured old fellow left the room, the child limped to the table, seized the bottle of spirits of which her proprietor had already taken heavy toll, and applied it to her lips with a relish that betokened premature acquaintance with such stimulants. Still further precocity was evinced by her next move. The bottle was still at her mouth when she heard the step of her host, and in a moment she had stripped one stocking from her leg, and was down upon a footstool.

"What are you doing, my poor child?" said Robert, as he came in.

"Please I was rubbing my poor leg with some gin, sir, to get the bruises out."

"No, no, don't use that," said Mr. Spencer; "we'll get you something better than that from the chemist's. Pull up your stocking, there's a dear, and come out with me. I must buy you some cakes, or what you'd like, for I can find nothing here. Your name's Susan, isn't it?"

"No, sir."

"I thought I heard that man call you Sue."

"Yes, sir, that's the short for Zuleika," said the child, who was still child enough to seem to take a little pride in her fine name.

"Zuleika, eh? And who are those people that were with you?"

"Uncle and aunt, sir."

"And if they are your uncle and aunt, why did they allow you to be beaten by my servant?"

"I don't know, sir," said Zuleika, who had evidently had orders not to be communicative. "I'm so hungry, sir," she added, artfully, by way of bringing the questioning to an end.

"Hungry, poor thing, are you? Well, we'll soon set that right. Come along, we'll get rid of the hunger."

Forth they went, and inasmuch as any kind of hunger that can be assuaged by the miscellaneous larder of Tottenham Court-road, may be at once combated there, at small cost, Robert Spencer easily fulfilled his promise. To do poor Zuleika justice, she was hungry, and disposed of a sausage, some hot eel, a saucer of whelks, and some curds and whey with great celerity, her patron permitting her entire freedom of selection, and only making imbecile faces as each nastiness was succeeded by something nastier. At Zuleika's instigation he then bought her some periwinkles, which were placed in a cone of newspaper, and holding this in the manner of a bouquet, and picking out

an occasional snail to eat as she walked, the child accompanied him down to Oxford-street.

"I suppose you wouldn't give us them coppers you took just now?" she said, glancing up sideways at him; and though the speech was worldly enough, the look had in it that childlike helplessness which touches anybody who can be touched at all.

Robert Spencer was vexed as well as touched, for he meant to have made her a present, and was sorry she had asked for it.

"What would you do with money, if I gave it you?"

"Hide it away against the time when they don't give me nothing to eat."

"But they are not often so poor as to have nothing for you, I hope?"

"*They* aint, of course, sir," said Zuleika. "But they say I shan't make old bones, so it's no odds whether I'm hungry or not."

"There, child, here's five shillings for you," said Robert, hastily. "And you know where I live?"

"Shouldn't wonder if I did," said the girl, laughing shrilly, and not pleasantly.

"Well, if you are in want at any time, come to me, and I'll give you a dinner. Why don't you take the money?"

"Give it us in tanners."

"Tanners," said Robert, laughing; "where did you learn slang, you little slut? And what do you want it in sixpences for?"

"If you don't, they'll take it all from me."

"Your uncle and aunt?"

Zuleika nodded, and smelt at her bouquet of periwinkles.

"I see. Then look here. Take the half-crowns, and say it was what I gave you. Let them take it if they like, and I'll give you five shillings in sixpences for yourself, which you can keep to yourself."

The child was silent, and did not seem altogether to approve of this liberal arrangement.

"Well," said Robert, "won't that do?"

"They'd know I wouldn't give it 'em all," said Zuleika; "and you've been a good friend to me, and you've no call to give them five bob. Give it us in smalls."

So Mr. Spencer gave her five shillings in sixpences, with the understanding that she was to say the present had been half-a-crown, which she had changed, and spent sixpence thereof. Perhaps, Zuleika observed, they might lick her, perhaps they might let her keep another sixpence, but it was no odds. Suddenly, Mr. Spencer missed her in the crowd, and felt annoyance that though she had, he was convinced, left him for good, she had not thanked him and wished him good-bye. It did not occur to him to ask himself where the poor child had been taught such amenities, or whether they were likely to spring like flowers as the natural ornaments of an education which was based on lying, starvation, and beating. Many good people say, and think, that their inferiors are ungrateful, with about as reasonable ground as our friend Bob Spencer had for complaining to himself of poor little Zuleika.

But in ten minutes more, being the time which it took him to get back to his own house, he encountered a grievance of a far more prac-

tical character. Mr. Keckling, it will be remembered, had cleared the house of most of its inmates, Mr. Claxton had driven out its mistress, the policeman had removed big Ann, and Mr. Spencer, in going out with Zuleika, had left it untenanted, and had shut the door behind him. Of course the supposition that the queen-regent would permit Robert Spencer a latch-key would be preposterous—we all know Henrietta better. And, in fine, he was locked out of an empty house. Humanity had been its own reward. He had fed the hungry, and was left roofless.

A profane idea of going round for a locksmith, and having the door forced, may have occurred to the master of the house, but it was only that he might dismiss it with hatred—almost with the feeling with which we scout, and scare through the ivory gate, the mad dreams in which those that we love and would die for are pictured by the devil of darkness as doing base or impure actions. And, thrusting his hand into his pocket, an habitual attitude with our financier (even when he knew that his hand would be quite solitary there), inasmuch as it had something of the capitalist about it, he lighted upon what seemed to him a heap of money—the sovereigns and silver out of Mr. Keckling's ten-pound note. Robert Spencer was quite pleased with his door for giving him so admirable an excuse for making a night of it.

But Mr. Spencer's idea of a night of it was, I need hardly say, young gentlemen, not much like yours. It did not comprise a dinner and too much wine, and half-price and too much bad air, and singing-rooms and too much grog and tobacco, and play-rooms and too much betting, and the *cetera* to which *desunt* may or may not sound like the fitting companion word. He was a virtuous, elderly man, with a taste of his own, which, weather and wife permitting, was to talk and listen to as much nonsense, in a social way, as could be compressed into a single evening. London is a place where this amusement may be obtained with no great difficulty, and Robert Spencer knew how to procure it at no great distance from his home.

In another quarter of an hour, Mr. Robert Spencer had engaged a bed for himself at a respectable tavern, and was seated at a table in a large and well-lighted room on the first floor of that establishment. He had assumed a new character, and abandoning that of the Good Samaritan, he had become a Rum Buffer.

The Rum Buffers were an unaffiliated branch of one of those terrific societies (obviously emanations of the Vehm Gericht) which cause such dread in the Court of the Tuileries, and peril the alliance between the two great kingdoms of the Eastern world. The Rum Buffers, indeed, were a more dangerous companionship than that from which they had severed, for they were revolutionary in the highest degree. In the original society, of which the ablest Buffers had been distinguished members, and which had been known as the Humps—perhaps themselves offshoots from the United Buffaloes—the chairman, the Grand Hump, as that mystic officer was called, enjoyed a casting vote. But when quarrels arose, and the harmony of the Humps was broken up by extreme personalities, pointed into epigrams by the simultaneous launch of pint-pots, the new republic, the Rum Buffers, sternly decided that their president should reign



but not govern, and that he should have neither veto nor assenting power. Should the existence of this society be revealed to the ministers of despots, it is difficult to think that its existence will be compatible with the preservation of our foreign relations.

At an exceedingly large and stout table—strong enough to be the scaffold for axe and block, should democracy have sway—sat Mr. Robert Spencer, with about twenty other Rum Buffers, whose thirst for tyrannicide was at that moment superseded by a thirst for spirits and water, and who, though ordinarily breathing vengeance against despots, were just then only breathing the vapours of something called Screws. The conspirators were chiefly of the trading class, and they had obtained, by incessant practice, such a fiendish mastery over their countenances that their diabolical expression was tamed down into one of pretended good-nature, and affected neighbourliness. They hypocritically laughed at small, and apparently harmless jokes (unless there were hidden meaning in the allusions), and but that one knew their dark designs against autocracy, and the relentless and bloodthirsty measures which they were panting to execute, it would not have been difficult to imagine them a knot of worthy and not over wise fellows, who liked to meet over matters socially, and to have rule and method in their fun.

The chairman, at the end of the oblong table, had no higher seat than his fellow-conspirators, but his chair had arms, which theirs lacked. The only sign which distinguished him was a cap, surmounted by a large, but light model of a railway buffer, on which was inscribed, in white letters on a black ground, "Rum." Apart from the deep political significance of this, it might be objected to as a bit of tomfoolery, and as such I would denounce it, if I were quite sure that such things were confined to plebeian gatherings, and that no club where noblemen—and I have heard, gentlemen—hebdomadally assemble, observe a similar rite. The inferiority of the Rum Buffers, however, is marked, for though they have the courage to let their chairman make a fool of himself, they see no amusement in a witty organization for the embarrassment of visitors, nor have they the daring—while perhaps a father and a son are sitting at the same table—to drink in form and with honours the sort of toasts which Rochester, when half drunk, would have proposed to Sedley.

A watchful stranger might have remarked that the landlord of the house, whose assumed joviality was more observable than that of any of his guests, generally waited upon them himself, and seemed very anxious that all should receive every attention, and if one could feel any sympathy for a man who made his house the den of assassins, it would be for a person so situated, who, knowing the furious and ruffianly character of the association, was compelled to pay such cringing care lest anything should occur to excite the tiger-nature to premature bloodshed.

The chairman, who (like the murderer Eugene Aram) was a school-master, and affected to regard the Buffers as his adult class meeting for evening instruction, complimented Mr. Spencer upon his re-appearance at the board, at which, for financial reasons, our friend Robert had not been an attendant of late. Mr. Spencer's excuses

were graciously received, as was a proposition on his part that he should be permitted to stand glasses all round. "Buffer Spencer, your health," was speedily heard on all sides, sometimes coupled with facetious additions, as "and many of 'em," or, "I looks to-vords yer."

More serious business then began, and the chairman, who, it should be said, was addressed (in democratic mockery of the title, "the Lord High," given to the Commissioner of the Ionian Isles) as the "Lord Rum," proceeded to apprise the Rum Buffers that the subject for discussion that evening was as follows:—

*"Whether the execution of King Charles the First had been beneficial to the country or not?"*

He would call upon Buffer Brigstock to open the debate by a motion in the affirmative.

Buffer Spencer begged to be allowed to interpolate a few preliminary words. (Cries of "Order.")

The Lord Rum said, that the elegant and classical language of the Buffer who had just risen should plead for momentary indulgence, especially as his visits resembled those described by an immortal poet as angelic—few and far between.

Buffer Brigstock said he would bow to the Lord Rum, and did bow, accordingly.

Buffer Spencer said, that what he was about to suggest might be deemed irregular, but he thought that there were crises——

The Lord Rum.—Crises. The Buffer will not confound the word with the name Chryses, priest of Apollo, whose prayers brought a pestilence on the Grecian host before Troy.

Buffer Spencer promised that he would not do so; and thanking the noble lord for the correction, would say that there were crises when regulations and precedents should be eliminated. (Hear, hear.) He thought that such a crisis had now occurred. The immediate question of the day was not, he thought, whether King Charles the First had been properly executed, but whether the Governor and Company of the Bank of England had exercised a wise discretion or an arbitrary tyranny in again raising the rate of discount, as they had yesterday done. (Murmurs.) This was his view, and with the permission of the noble lord, he should move a resolution to the effect that such be the discussion of the evening.

Buffer Sancock rose to order. It was not competent for any Buffer to bring on a motion after the Lord Rum had called on them to open the debate.

Buffer Dill considered that the introduction of such a subject was highly uncalled for. They met there for the social hour and the social glass; and to talk over topics of a pleasant nature, like King Charles's execution, was all very well. But a question about the Bank and discounts took them back to their cash-books and cheque-books, and he considered that this was anything but the right thing. Buffer Spencer was not engaged in trade, and his vast mercantile transactions might make such matters agreeable to him; but it was not so with everybody.

Tradesmen being proverbial for knowing nothing about the affairs of their neighbours and customers, of course this sarcasm of Buffer

Dill's was not understood, and the winks that were exchanged had nothing to do with it.

The Lord Rum said that they had doubtless made laws ; but as the person who made anything was greater than the thing he made, and——

Buffer Nodcumb said this was not always so. Last winter his little boy had made a snow-ball three times as big as himself, and rolled it against the washus door.

The Lord Rum wished he had been behind him with a well wax-ended cane. But he was about to say, that those who made laws, being greater than what they made, could unmake them. *Quod erat demonstrandum*. If, therefore, it were the pleasure of the meeting that the resolution proposed should be taken into consideration, he did not think that they were precluded from such discussion.

Buffer Brigstock, fortified by this here——

Buffer Nodcumb.—And fiftified by that hair. The honourable Buffer pointed to the greyish locks of the speaker. This, the epigram of the evening, elicited roars of laughter, and the members repeated it to one another for the next quarter of an hour. Order being restored,

Buffer Spencer moved the resolution of which he had given notice.

Buffer Brigstock did not understand that kind of conduct. It had been settled that the King was the subject——

Buffer Nodcumb wished to know how that could be? But his interruption was this time ineffective.

Buffer Brigstock proceeded. He had been at a good deal of pains, and some expense, to make himself acquainted with the business, and he did not see why what he might call taking the bread out of his mouth was to be the order of the day. He would not impute motives ; but for an honourable Buffer to begin with standing glasses round, and then to try to revolutionize them, was a little too inconsistent. Looney Napoleon had given the army sausages—(cries of "Order")—and very good things sausages were, as he ought to know, who sold them—(cheers and laughter) ; but the principle of bribery was opposed to the feelings of Englishmen.

Buffer Spencer was eager to disclaim, in the most solemn manner, any such idea. The imputation must proceed from some one better acquainted with dead cats than with living Englishmen.

It need hardly be said that this insinuation produced a stormy debate, in the course of which a good deal of harsh language was used, but it ended by Buffer Spencer's refusing to make any apology, but volunteering to retract the words "dead cats," and to substitute for them "traditions of the past." This being deemed satisfactory, the discussion proceeded, and

The Lord Rum put the question, when it became evident that despite the noble anti-bribery theory of Buffer Brigstock, the glasses round had not been without their effect. There were for the Bank Discussion 14, for the Martyrdom Question 8.

Buffer Spencer hoped that all acerbity would now be forgotten, and as the most cantankerous sausage-maker in existence could not now charge him with having any object to gain, he would ask the noble

lord's permission to moisten a dry discussion with another glasses round. (Cheers, and the order given.)

The Lord Rum.—*Cito dat qui Bis dat.* (Applause.)

Buffer Nodcumb (as a nigger).—What am Dat? (Laughter.)

Buffer Spencer then said.—It is my intention to move a resolution amounting to a vote of censure upon the ignorant, corrupt, and jobbing corporation called the Bank of England, and I think, my lord, that when such a resolution, from a meeting like this, finds its way into the foolishly called Parlour of that abominable institution, the effect will resemble that of a thirteen-inch shell discharged from a mortar into the trenches of the dismayed and astounded enemy. (Cheers.) Now, my lord, I will first ask myself a question—

Buffer Hyde (a lawyer's clerk, with much general information).—And a devilish foolish answer you'll get, as Lord Bacon said to Lord Mansfield.

Buffer Spencer hoped not. He would ask himself what was a Bank?

The Lord Rum.—Derived originally from the Latin *Bancus*.

Buffer Spencer was indebted for that most valuable information. He would then endeavour to define one. He would say that a bank was a locality made a receptacle for the circulating medium, conditionally on its flux and reflux being regulated in conformity with the temporary exigencies of society. (Hear, hear.) He was proud to find that his definition was accepted, and he would next proceed to ask how far the Bank of England realized that definition? Society was composed of various parts, but perhaps the most natural partition would be to divide it into the classes who can help themselves, and the classes who cannot.

Mr. Nodcumb apologized for interrupting, but the distance at which the backy-box was from him left him among the latter class, unless the speaker, by pushing it, would enable him to join the former, and help himself.

Buffer Spencer resumed. He was one of those who would assert, without fear of contradiction, that an institution, let it call itself a bank or what it liked, that ignored the existence of one of those classes, and reserved its advantages for the other, was a mockery, a delusion, and a snare. And such was the conduct of the Bank of England. He challenged contradiction. Were the Brothers Baring to enter the court of the Bank, and demand a loan, whether of shillings for cab hire, or thousands for some gigantic operation, they would have it. Did the Baron Rothschild desire to buy up Jericho or Damascus, the money would be sent by the Bank either to his counting-house or to his mansion in Piccadilly. If the Marquis of Westminster had set his eye on a Murillo in the city, and instead of going home for the money, sent into Mr. Weguelin for it, the footman would come back with ten, twenty, or thirty thousand pounds in his menial hat. But reverse the picture.

Mr. Nodcumb.—The Murillo?

Buffer Spencer.—No, Buffer, the circumstances. Suppose that I, having no money and no credit, but seeing a legitimate enterprise before me which must result in prosperity, were to send my paper to the Bank for acceptante and discount, should I get it?

The smile that passed across the faces of several of the solvent and well-to-do tradesmen around the speaker, did not seem exactly to promise that if they were to be the discounters he proposed to apply to, the money would be quite so ready as in the other cases he had mentioned. The Lord Rum noted this, and perhaps having a little fellow-feeling with Mr. Spencer, from not always having the school-bills regularly paid (people who would think it a sin to defraud the butcher will often evade the dues to the teacher), he interposed with a good-natured suggestion, that it might be as well to avoid what he called individualization. But Mr. Spencer had partaken of a good deal of refreshment, and was moreover a capitalist at the moment, and could afford to talk of his poverty.

He thanked the noble lord for a delicacy which he could assure him was highly appreciated, but he wished to put a strong case. He was free to confess that his own paper was not, at that crisis, what in financial circles would be termed first-class, but he was equally free to assert that his commercial instincts and acquirements were subordinate to none. Inferior abilities had been plastered up with paper.

Buffer Bressummer, as a builder, who knew something about plastering, might take the liberty of saying that such a thing was impossible.

Buffer Hopgood had never heard of paper being a plaster, except brown paper and vinegar, when the boy fell down the hill and broke his crown.

The Lord Rum said that Buffer Spencer's illustration was an imaginative one, but perhaps permissible in oratory; though, did it appear in severer composition, he should animadvert upon it.

Buffer Spencer, in continuation, would allow that he had a personal antipathy to the Bank of England, but his strictures were based on public grounds. But for the mean, tyrannical, and cowardly policy of that institution (the orator's voice began to falter) he, instead of humbly entertaining those whom he was proud to see around him, with spirituous liquors in a tavern-room, would have been offering them the best of claret, in a splendid dining-room, hung round with researchy pictures, and graced with the presence of female loveliness. This the Bank of England had denied him, and he hungered and thirsted for the day when that rotten corporation, undermined by its own atrocious treacheries, and crushed by its own appalling tyrannies, should sink into irretrievable and—and—immeasurable annihilation.

The British are just, and never withhold from a man who has fairly toiled through a mass of syllables the guerdon of warm applause. We have a veneration for what resembles eloquence—a veneration entirely irrespective of the meaning of words. Mr. Spencer's peroration was loudly cheered, by auditors who immediately added to one another that what he had said was neither here nor there.

The Lord Rum said that he was sure the meeting would sympathize with a speaker whose chief enmity to an institution was founded on its preventing his doing more kindness to his friends (applause); and by way of corollary to Buffer Spencer's propositions, and in order

to diversify the night, he would suggest that they should give him musical honours.

With much enthusiasm the Rum Buffers delivered a chorus, bearing their united testimony to the jollity and goodness of Buffer Spencer's fellowship.

Buffer Spencer was again upon his legs, but visibly affected. He might be said to have been a jolly good fellow, there were the makings of it in him, or perhaps he had better say the remains, for he was a crushed worm (cries of "No, no"). Yes, he was, crushed and trampled to the earth by the iniquity of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, who had blasted his mercantile reputation, ruined his commercial enterprises, and driven the iron into his very soul. But he defied the Bank of England, and all its minions, from the haughty Governor in his gilded chariot to the sniggering clerk on his threepenny omnibus, and they might all ———

He concluded with proposing that Threadneedle-street should transfer its establishment to a quarter where, if Milton is right, it would have in Mammon a convenient neighbour in case of a run. The noble lord in the chair, however, suggested that it would be rather irregular to put this suggestion into a formal resolution, and a milder, but still highly condemnatory motion was submitted to the Rum Buffers. And as these gentlemen did not care in the least about the Bank of England, and had no objection to pay a little compliment to their friend, who a third time proposed to refresh the meeting at his own proper charge, there was carried and registered against that institution one of the severest and most vindictive sentences ever placed on record since the days of Cato and Carthage.

The party separated at a reasonable hour, as became men who had to arise betimes; but Robert Spencer, exultant in his new liberty, did not see fit to retire to bed until he had made a not very steady circuit of observation in the neighbourhood. As he passed a small public-house in a squalid street, chiefly inhabited by sellers of birds and stealers of dogs, he heard the notes of a fiddle, which recalled to him the scene of the early part of the evening:

"She might have wished me good-night," murmured the Buffer; "but it's no odds, as she says. I forgive her. I forgive her. Ungrateful slut."

Uttering these words with the care which the awakened conscience of a man who has taken too much bids him bestow upon his delivery, Mr. Spencer smiled elaborately, and then thought he would look into the house whence the music proceeded. What he observed, on entering, seemed to him, in his hazy state, like a dream.

For there was Zuleika in the taproom of the public-house, evidently the star and centre of attraction. The room, with its sanded floor, coarse seats, and coarser company, on whom shone a flaring gas-light that brought out the dinginess of garment and dirtiness of flesh with displeasing strength, was hot and fusty, and Robert Spencer felt a little tipsier, after inhaling its unwholesome atmosphere for a minute or two. The child was in the middle, under the light, and was executing a dance to the music of the performer whom Mr. Spencer had found in his kitchen, and who was seated at the end in

one of the boxes, urging her to renewed efforts when her wearied little limbs did not obey her will, or rather his, with sustained precision. The woman was also present, somewhat intoxicated, but sufficiently sober to keep her eager eye on the few halfpence which, when the dance was over, Zuleika was sent round to collect. Few gave money, but several offered drink to the child, and when the drink was spirituous, she was not unwilling to sip.

"Clever young thing, that," said one of the spectators—a decent-looking mechanic—to Spencer, as the latter sat down opposite to him.

"I—I have seen her before somewhere," returned Spencer.

"Like enough, for she's always about. They do take it out of her, that's a fact," said the other in a lower voice. "She's worth her salt."

"Salt—salt—saltatory—yes," remarked Mr. Spencer, lucidly.

"She's at it all the evening," said the other, who, pleased to have got a listener, disregarded the quality of his listening; "and I don't understand how she manages to keep it up, but habit's everything. First, she has to dance in an open air bally at Clipy (possibly Cal-liope) Gardens. Then she gets away to dance in the pantermine, and from the Clipy Gardens—which is by Rotherhithe—to the theaytre is three good mile, take it which way you will, and her friends don't look as if they invested much money in busses. Then when she's done in the pantermine she gets her own clothes on—and changing dresses ever so many times is wearying work, I'm told—and then they take her from public-house to public-house, and she dances, as it might be here. Sometimes the company won't have 'em at no price, and the waiter turns 'em out; sometimes they'll let her dance and dance; and mind you, some of her steps are first-rate, for I've a cousin who's a young man in an orchestra, and he's seen her, and he's a judge; and when she's danced herself out, they won't give anything, or perhaps only lush. Sometimes, though, she picks up a good lot of coppers, and the woman there, which she calls her aunt, but is as much her aunt as I am, she sacks that. I don't suppose the poor child gets any of it, but I dare say she gets jolly well licked when the coppers don't come in."

"It's a —— shame," jerked out Mr. Spencer, compressing his lips, and staring in a most owlsh manner.

"That's about it," said the other; "and I've got children of my own, and sooner than one on 'em should be brought up to that sort of thing, I'd put her in the cistern with a brick tied to her neck, and think I'd done the right and the kind thing by her. Here, Sal," he said, "here's a brown for you. Going to give us another par?"

"Shy lot," said Zuleika.

"Then I'm off," said the other, "as the sport's over." He poddod to the child, and went away. He was a good-natured man, and kind to his own children, but it never occurred to him that in witnessing and encouraging the performance, he was taking part in the wrong he had condemned. Why should a mechanic be wiser than his betters? Mrs. Brown is the best wife in Tyburnia, Mrs. Jones is the best mother in Bromptonia, and Mrs. Robinson is the best wife and

mother in Belgravia, and all three would shudder at sitting down in the same room (or pew) with a Traviata. Yet they all three know that milliners' girls work fifteen hours in a day, and that ballet girls are paid twelve shillings a week. When the ladies order dresses and take boxes, does it occur to them that they are part of the system that sends portly parsons and obese churchwardens clamouring to a home secretary for police bludgeons to beat guilty creatures out of Respectable streets.

It is, indeed, a good thing that there are no Druids in England, or we might be daily offering living sacrifices of the bodies of our children. What cause for joy and thankfulness has every one who lives in an enlightened age, and witnesses the march of intellect, and the triumphs of civilization. And what a heathenish view the poet, Keats, must have taken of society, when he could write,—

“And but to think is to be full of sorrow.”

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### COUSIN LATIMER'S LOVE.

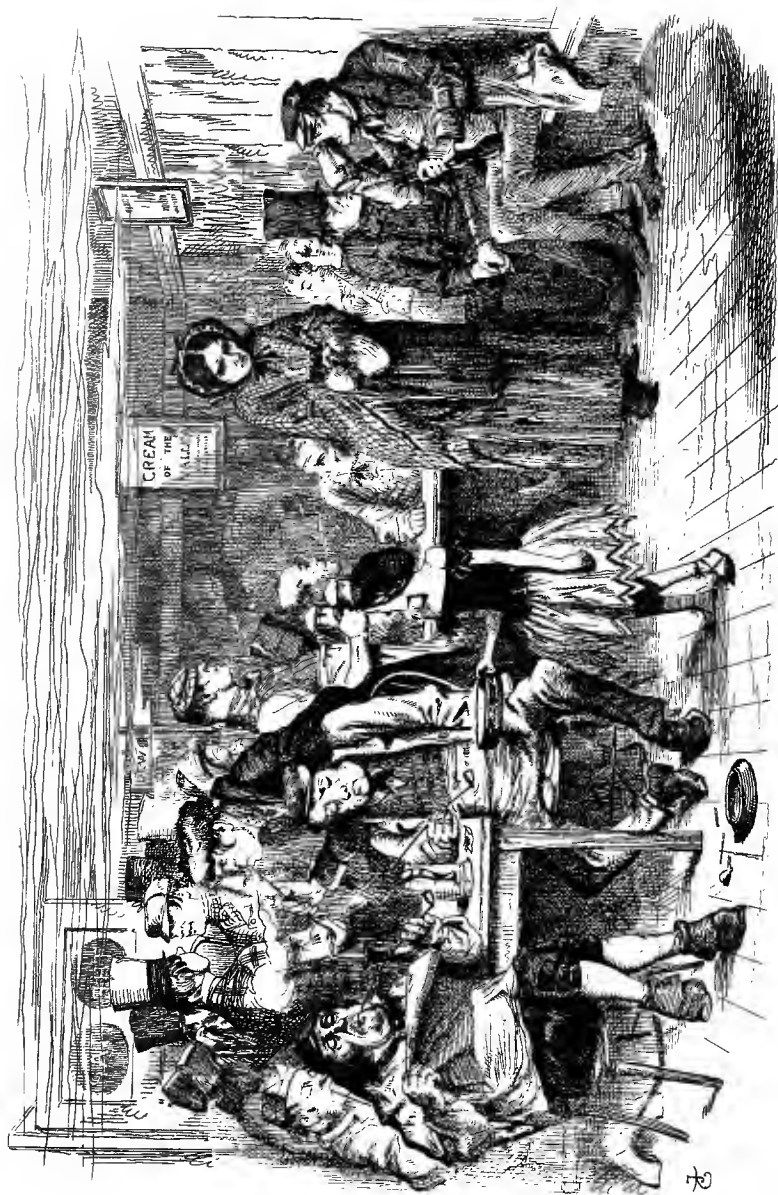
MR. LATIMER CHERITON, it has been said, wrote divers letters to his beautiful cousin, when she was at Ryde, and it was only after several of them had been received that Margaret was completely enlightened, and answered him becomingly. He certainly desired some encouragement in the course which he was taking, but it is just to him to say that he did not wait for that stimulus. Latimer had but little of his brother Alban in his nature. When he wanted anything he asked for it, and if it were not to be had for asking, he did his best to get it.

What he wanted at this part of our story was a young lady of the name of Lizzie Pybus.

As far as Miss Pybus herself was concerned, there was no particular difficulty in his way. Lizzie was an exceedingly nice, cheerful, affectionate little girl, with bright hair (a good deal of it, and in clustering curls), pleasant features, wearing an expression of readiness to be pleased, pretty round white arms, and that species of figure around which it might rather occur to you to put your own arm than to retire some distance for artistic contemplation. Her eyes were dark, and her lips were red, and she could sing songs (not much opera music), and could play quadrilles upon the pianoforte, and never looked cross at being asked to do so. Her feet were very neat, reminding one of Sir John Suokling's mice, and altogether, without there being anything very remarkable about her, she was one of our dear good little English girls with whom Providence has lodged the man-taming secret that tells them How to make home Happy.

This was all very well, and Latimer Cheriton, having met this Miss Pybus and a few of her sisters at a dance, thought that Lizzie would





*Modern Druids.*

London: Richard Bentley, 1858.



do very well to make his home happy. He was not very long before he managed to be intimate enough with her to confide to her his opinion, and was very much delighted to find that she had no objection to try the experiment. Why should she hesitate? Her heart was disengaged, and Latimer was a handsome, merry, honourable young fellow, calculated to make an excellent husband. I ask again, why should she hesitate? The class to which Lizzie Pybus belongs does not read French novels, and its maidens do not wait to love until they can find a scoundrel, and then call him their Destiny.

But, you see, though the willingness of two persons to be married together may be regarded as an important element in the promotion of a match, it is not all that is necessary.

Mr. Pybus, the young lady's father, was one of those gentlemen who, in the House of Commons, are the real representatives of the country. The father of Latimer's love was not like the father of Arundel, a sworn law-maker. But he was a member of the select body to whom the law-makers address themselves when they wish the nation to know what they say, the body to whom unless a statesman appeals, and makes himself heard by the same, his name will be little regarded by the world, and his speeches will not be regarded at all. When a member merely spoke to the House, he turned towards Mr. Arundel, of Thanington-square. When he spoke to the country, he turned towards Mr. Pybus, of Lloyd-square. It is, one would hope, needless to add (and therefore let us add it) that Mr. Pybus was a Parliamentary Reporter.

Mrs. Pybus had been as pretty a girl as Lizzie, and was still pleasant looking, and what may be termed comely. I cannot tell how she had managed to preserve all her teeth so well, for they were as regular and white as when her smile had first disclosed their enamel to the enamoured Charles Pybus—and they were the same set. People say acids are bad for the teeth—nothing acid ever came out of that good-natured woman's mouth, that is quite certain. Charles Pybus thought her just as charming as when they were married by the late venerable and venerated Bishop of Calcutta, at the Church of St. Mary, Islington, and held that none of her daughters were at all equal to her. And good as her teeth were, her eyes had been just enough injured by time to make her blind to the fact that years and gallery hours had put some grey into her Charles's hair, and some crowsfeet into his handsome face. They lived in great comfort and happiness in Lloyd Square, Mr. Pybus's salary being a capital one, and his earnings in other ways being by no means small. But then,

There were nine girls. Nine Misses Pybus, or Miss Pybuses, or Pybi.

Their nine names were Fanny, Mary, Lizzie, Jane, Lucy, Barbara, Lavinia, Jemima, and Magdalena. From this recapitulation it will be perceived that the young couple began (as usual) by complimenting relatives by christening children after them, but gradually finding (as usual) that such compliment produces no particular benefit, they obliged the children, instead, by giving them pretty names to wear through life.

Our Lizzie, and Mr. Latimer's, was the third. I do not say that

she was the prettiest of them all, though he would have said so. The wittiest lady novelist of our day cleverly says that a man often takes one girl out of a handsome family, who have looked excessively well together, and when he has married her, finds that his share of the general stock of good looks is a small one. Nobody who has married a Miss Pybus told this to Mrs. Gore. Each of the grown-up girls had a special grace of her own, and they were all distinguishable. You never took Jane for Barbara, or Mary for Lucy, though you had not met the girls three times. Lizzie's speciality was her active good-nature, which could never be kept out of sight. She had a faculty of finding out occasions to be good-natured, when very well disposed folks could not see them. And if reduced to such straits that she could not do a kind thing, Lizzie, rather than be quite idle, would say one.

The merits of the other eight young ladies are not material to the course of our narrative, but they all had merits, besides their looks, and we may see more of them hereafter. But I think a reader should not be a flirt, and should be content with the intimate acquaintance which an author permits him to form with the choicest of the characters that meet them, and should not desire to be upon equally good terms with everybody. It is not because we are reading a book that we should forget our refined and fastidious manners, and cultivate a familiarity which would be most objectionable in ordinary life. And a reader who finds that his author abstains from making him intimate with any particular character, or taking him home to any particular house, ought to conclude, as a gentleman would do in society, that the other has a good reason for his abstinence, and feel obliged to him.

It has now been shown pretty plainly, I imagine, why there was an obstacle in the way of the union between Latimer and Lizzie. Mr. Pybus had not a fortune that he could divide by nine, and the young lawyer was only just coming into two hundred a year—four pounds a week.

Latimer was very fond of Lizzie, but he was a prudent young fellow, and he walked round Lloyd Square a great many times of a night after he had left her father's house, and meditated on the means of increasing his income. People really ought to be ashamed of themselves, he thought, for not quarrelling half enough, and neglecting to throw business in the way of a meritorious young solicitor who wished to marry a loveable young lady.

The next time he called, and he really visited the Pybuses very often, it was in the evening, shortly before the close of the season. All the girls were delighted to see him, from Fanny, the Vicereine, to little Magdalena, who was virtually the Queen of the establishment, and whose despotism was only tempered by her being sent to bed when her unconstitutional practices became too much for her loving subjects and sisters. And as it was desirable to do something to amuse themselves and their visitor, Fanny sang, Mary asked a new charade, Jane narrated a story abridged by herself from the *London Journal* (with the trifling omission of its real points), Lucy developed the mysteries of a cat's-cradle of her own invention, Barbara brought him some tea,

Lavinia challenged him to chess, and was check-mated in nine moves, Jemima brought him some more tea, and Magdalena got upon his knee, and pulled the pin out of his scarf. Lizzie merely came and sat near him, and though she did nothing else to amuse him, he appeared as much pleased with this attention as with any of the other ministrations.

"I thought papa was to be at home this evening," said Latimer.

"He expected that there would be a count-out," said Lizzie; "but we have often noticed that when such a thing has been most likely, he has been kept until very late."

"If I were a reporter," said Latimer, "I would show special favour to any member who counted the house out, and when he wanted to distinguish himself, he should be immortalized at great length. I would make it worth his while to be humane. Just imagine them keeping people in a hot chamber, on such a lovely evening as this, to hear debates, even if they were good, which they are quite sure not to be."

"Yes, but it must soon be over now," said Fanny. "The house was up before this time last year. And then for the sea-side, eh, mamma?"

"For one or two of you, perhaps," said Mrs. Pybus, with pretended reserve. But a remonstrant chorus of "O, ma," and some merrily defiant laughter, showed that the young ladies were not greatly discouraged by the oracle.

"Fanny will go, of course," said mamma, "because she is the eldest."

"And Maddy, because she is the youngest," cried out Miss Magdalena, determined to make all safe at once. Each of the others spoke for herself.

"And Mary, because she has not been very well."

"And Jane, because she will be very unwell if she doesn't."

"And Lucy, because she didn't go last year."

"Why, you were at Seven-Oaks, my dear," said Mrs. Pybus.

Lucy caught up Jemima's school maps, and, turning to England, begged her mamma to take notice that Seven-Oaks was not by the sea-side, and finished the geographical lesson with a kiss.

"Barbara is going," said that young lady, "because papa promised her."

"Lavinia is going, because she is very fond of Margate."

"And of somebody else who is gone there," said Lucy, whereat Miss Lavinia coloured a little and laughed, and tossed her young head, and said it was no such thing, so of course it was.

"Jemima must go, because everybody else is going, and you wouldn't be so cruel as to leave her in the house by herself."

"You would be with me, you know, Mima dear," said Lizzie, smiling.

"O, but you are going too," cried out four or five voices.

"We cannot all go, that is quite certain," said Lizzie. "Fancy," she said, turning to Latimer, "fancy Papa going up to a door and asking whether he could have rooms for nine girls, of various sizes."

"It would sound rather awfully," said Latimer; "but it would be

a very stern landlady that could refuse you, if she saw you all. But did you ever hear of the American story about the widow who got into the house where no children were admitted?"

"Tell me," said Magdalena, peremptorily.

"Well, she saw the landlord, and made terms, and when he asked her whether she had any children, she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and said, with sobs, that she had had eight boys, but that they were all in the churchyard. So she got possession, and then sent for the eight boys out of the churchyard, where she had left them to play leap-frog while she managed the business."

The laugh had not finished when Mr. Pybus came in, and there was a rush at his neck, and much kissing.

"We didn't hear you knock, papa," said Mrs. Pybus.

"You did not?" demanded Mr. Pybus, with solemnity. "Ahem. For your not having heard me knock, I might assign several reasons, but I shall trouble you with the last only, namely, that I came in without knocking, and with my latch-key. I burst upon you un-awares, and I find Bacchanalian revelry."

"You got the count-out then, after all," said Latimer, as soon as the garland of daughters disentwined itself from their father, and allowed him to shake hands with the visitor.

"Yes, but it was a close thing, for that ass Myope wanted a House, that he might let off a speech he has been cooking up about Exchequer Bills. If, three months back, he knew an Exchequer Bill from a Dividend Warrant, it's as much as he did. We should have been all right, for they wouldn't have made a House for a quack like that, but some Irishmen wanted to bring in a plan for a railway along the Giant's Causeway, and so they stopped, instead of going away to dinner like men. However, the whips stood by the door and kept fellows back, and luckily, a boat upset in the river, just before the terrace, and ever so many men ran out to see that, and a good fellow, who was wide awake, snatched the moment, and moved the count."

"Nobody was drowned, I hope, papa," said Barbara.

"If anybody had been, my dear, his noble devotion in saving me a wearisome evening would have been amply repaid by my gratitude. You don't think so? Well, then, nobody was drowned. Have they been taking care of you, Latimer?"

"All care, thank you."

"I have taken care of him. I have taken care of his shirt-pin," cried Miss Magdalena, displaying the article, stuck into the front of her dress.

"Give it back directly, Maddy the madcap," said her father. "Mr. Cheriton spoils you, and I don't know where he learns the habit, unless it's from your parents and your sisters."

Very much at home, therefore, was our merry Latimer among the Pybuses, and the head of the house had taken a strong and natural liking for him, and saw, with no dissatisfaction, which way things would eventually go.

"I have no money to give my girls," he said, walking in the Square with Latimer, while an early supper was in preparation; "but as I value each of them at twenty thousand pounds, the man who gets

my consent must make handsome settlements, and you shall have the job of drawing them up."

"I shall be very glad to take Instructions," said the young lawyer. "In the meantime, I want to consult you about a matter on which I have been meditating for some time. May I?"

"Refer your question to a select committee, consisting of me, and you shall have an early report."

"I have just entered, as you know, into business with Mr. Sandpiper, and there is every prospect of its becoming a good one."

"I weep as a philanthropist, but rejoice as a friend."

"Now, in the meanwhile, and as my time is far from being fully occupied, what do you say to an idea I have of entering the reporters' gallery, and so making my income better than it is likely otherwise to be? It is on this that I came to ask your advice."

"Well, some are born reporters, some achieve reporting, and some have reporting thrust upon them. It is no play, I can tell you, but work that requires not only very considerable abilities, but great wideawakeateness, and great industry. Have you got all this?"

"You can judge of my abilities for the work. I think I know myself well enough to say that I am not afraid of falling short in the other two qualifications."

"Do you know anything of shorthand?"

"I have been working at it."

"Nothing but practice, and unremitting practice, will make you skilful. You must think in shorthand. No day must pass without your taking a spell at it. Write it whenever you can get a pencil into your hand. Write down your washing-bills in it; write your love-letters in it; write your diary in it; take down in it the gossip in an omnibus, the sermon in church, the dialogue at the theatre, the speeches of your counsel. Steep your mind in stenography, and you'll do; but it is one of the few things in this world that are not to be done by halves."

"I quite see the value of your advice as to acquiring the art; but what do you say about my taking up the pursuit?"

"This. If you go at it in earnest, you will succeed, and in due course you will get an engagement, which will make a pleasant addition to your legal earnings. Then you will learn a great deal, both of men and things; for, nonsense apart, the House of Commons is a grand machine, and though the steam-engine is not always in gear, it is only fools that fancy the machine is worked by ass-power. A few sessions in that gallery are no bad way of finishing a young man's education, Cheriton."

"That I am sure of," said Latimer, "but I tell you frankly that my immediate views are avaricious. I want more money."

"Most people do," said Mr. Pybus, smiling. He was not going to be drawn into asking the young man why he wanted money, though I dare say Mr. Latimer Cheriton wished that he would. "Well," he continued, "you have now a good half year before you; Parliament will be up in a week, and will not meet again until February. If, towards Christmas, you feel that you have mastered the art—and mind, though I don't know what training you have given

yourself, I do not suppose that anything under a year will qualify you for the gallery—come to me, and we will see whether anything can be done. But once more I would impress upon you, that constant work is the sole means to this end.”

“Upon my word I wish,” said Latimer, “that, if it would not be boring you past bearing, you would give me five minutes of your attention now, and see how far I have got.”

“With all my heart. But there’s Maddy at the window waving the signal for supper. We’ll put you through your paces afterwards.”

“After supper,” said Latimer, in some trepidation.

“Yes,” said Mr. Pybus, “why not. If the girls talk, so much the better, as it will accustom you to the giggle and clack of the ladies over our heads in the House, who revenge themselves for not being seen by making themselves most unpleasantly heard.”

This last sentence was uttered as they came in.

“How ungallant,” said Barbara. “Besides, you should send the ladies a polite message, and then they would be quiet.”

“Would they, Babbums,” said her father. “I’ve often sent you one, in your time, without that desirable effect.”

“Ah! that was when I was young,” said Sixteen. “I dare say, now, that instead of being polite, you look round and scowl at the ladies, and say rude things about them.”

“The single men do, sometimes, my dear, and would send the police to them, if possible, but the married men are much more indulgent, besides knowing better.”

The cheerful meal over, and the glasses on the board, Mr. Pybus said to Latimer:—

“There’s some paper, and there’s a pencil.”

“Is he going to draw our pictures,” said Maddy. “Do mine first, Mr. Cheriton, please, do.” And the young lady stuck herself straight up, in what she conceived to be a sitter’s true attitude.

“Will you be quiet, miss,” said papa, “and not remind me that you are sitting up to supper, contrary to all the proprieties? I am taking an apprentice, and I want to try whether he will suit me.”

Was there any reason why Lizzie’s colour should rise, and why her eyes should sparkle with pleasure? Latimer has since told her that they did, but she has replied that he was too much flustered with his first lesson to look at her.

“Now, then, Order at the Bar,” said Mr. Pybus, in a rolling, sonorous voice, in imitation of some fine tones which please the Commons’ ears no longer, but will long, let it be hoped, fall pleasantly upon those of the territorial aristocracy. “The question is, whether the Right Honourable Charles Pybus shall not forthwith betake himself, *by* himself, unto some sea-side residence for a month or two, leaving his incumbrances to take care of the house in Lloyd-square. Order! order!” exclaimed the Speaker, as a turmoil of protest broke forth.

“We won’t be left behind,” cried Maddy, “and that’s all about it.”

“Ring the bell for the Sergeant-at-Arms, and desire her to commit the honourable member to bed,” said Mr. Pybus. “Reporter, are you awake?”



"O, I wasn't going to write that sort of thing. I was waiting for the speeches," said Latimer.

"But it is that sort of thing, and every sort of thing, that you must learn to take, and be able to describe graphically, sir, at the very shortest notice. If an earthquake should open the floor of the House during a debate, you are not to take your pencil off your paper, but to go on, saying that some interruption here occurred, owing to a convulsion of nature, and fourteen or fifteen honourable members were swallowed up, among whom you noticed so and so, and new writs having been moved for the counties and boroughs thus vacated, the debate was resumed. But you want speeches. Now, then. The question is before the House. Lady Fanny Pybus."

Fanny.—I think that the right honourable daddy——

The Speaker.—Order!

Fanny.—Well, then, I think that Mr. Pybus ought to do exactly what he likes, and I am of this opinion, because I am quite sure that he will like to take mamma and me with him, though he may decide, in his wisdom, that it is better for younger persons to be domestic in their early days (murmurs).

Magdalena.—I am going, and so I tell you. (Goes round, and in the most unparliamentary manner gets upon the Speaker's knee.)

Mr. Pybus.—Somebody go and fetch me the Honourable Robert Bourke's Parliamentary Precedents. I am really not aware of the course the Speaker should adopt when he is sat upon.

All this time Mr. Pybus kept a keen eye upon Latimer, and observed with satisfaction that he was at all events writing on, and had not come to grief and stagnation.

Barbara.—A great writer has remarked, that of all the passions implanted in the human breast, one of the most hurtful is that of selfishness (hear, hear, from several voices). I might deduce instances of this passion from my biographical dictionary, but I think I will not. But I should just like to ask Miss Fanny how——

The Speaker.—Order! Order! The honourable member is out of order in addressing, or naming any other honourable member. I am the person spoken at by everybody, and I am called Sir.

Barbara.—Then, *Sir*, I should like to ask you whether you think the honourable—what am I to say—the honourable creature over there would like to be left behind, when her sisters go out of town?

Fanny.—I should like to know whether it is regular for the individual to call me a creature.

The Speaker.—If the word is used simply as implying that the honourable member is part of the system of creation, I apprehend that the term is not one which can properly be repudiated; but if it be intended as imputing to the honourable member any qualities of an objectionable nature, it is irregular, and must be withdrawn.

Barbara.—I only meant that she was a selfish pig, and I don't see why this pig should go to Margate and this pig stay at home; any more than why this pig should have some bread and butter while this pig has none.

The debate was here enlivened by Miss Magdalena's giving a

lively imitation of the utterances of the fifth pig mentioned in the digital ballad cited by Barbara.

The Speaker.—The reporter will be good enough to be instantly reminded of the zoological noises with which the House used to be amused in the early days of reform in Parliament.

Mr. Latimer Cheriton.—But I was not there, and I did not know that such noises were then made.

Mr. Pybus.—That has nothing to do with it. You ought to know everything that can by possibility have any bearing upon any subject which comes under your notice. Suppose that a speaker referred to such a thing, and you could not very well hear him. What a muddle you might make of your sentence from not being familiar with what he was talking about. I tell you that you must know everything. Have you done enough, or shall we talk any more nonsense for you to take down?

Mr. Cheriton.—Nearly all I have done has been rather conversation than speaking. Could you give me a bit of level oratory.

Mr. Pybus.—Why, the other is ten times the hardest. Anybody who can take dialogue can take anything. One reporter used to say that he was always ten words ahead of most speakers. But come, take a few lines of the real Parliamentary stuff. (Rises, and takes a graceful attitude.) It is not, sir, too much to say that I could have tendered my humble support to this resolution, or, rather, I should say, have expressed my humble sentiments on the question (for I have listened in vain, sir, for a resolution from your lips), with appreciably more satisfaction had I been enabled, either from the structure of the question, or from the arguments that have proceeded from the other side, to arrive at a clear perception of the objects sought to be attained. And in the first place, sir, I would be permitted to ask who is the Honourable Charles Pybus upon whose contemplated action this House is called, in the absence of all information, to pronounce a verdict of authorization. I, sir, am free to confess that I am one of those who do not think that the solemn opinion of this House ought to be invoked upon every trivial occasion. *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus*. And presuming that I were to grant, sir, as I do not say that I am unwilling to do, to the friends and admirers of Mr. Pybus, that the gentleman in question is graced with every virtue that can adorn and illustrate our common humanity, I still, sir, find myself as remote as ever from a solution of the problem why his domestic arrangements should be the subject of investigation in this House —. Now, Latimer, imagine yourself touched on the shoulder, your “turn” is done, and so snatch up your note-book and leave your stall, into which your successor dives noiselessly, and takes the next word. Let’s look.

The look of the shorthand was so satisfactory to Mr. Pybus, that Lizzie’s eyes had another opportunity of sparkling at his words, and when Latimer had written out the scene from his notes, and they were read, on another evening, to the party, they all applauded the faithfulness with which he had “taken” their chatter. So that the matrimonial prospects of our cousin Latimer do not look so wild as when we first spoke of them.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON.

"AMUSE yourself your own way, my dear, until lunch-time," said the Russian merchant to Margaret, one morning during their stay at Ryde. "I have business in the town that may occupy me for some time."

Soon afterwards Mr. Keckling was seated in a retired apartment in one of the quieter portions of Ryde. It was a room which was kept for him, and contained a box or two of papers, and some other indications of business, which he chose to exclude from Anemone Lodge.

With him was a plain-looking, plainly-dressed man, of middle age, who might have been a confidential clerk, or a detective officer, or a supercargo, or anything else that gives the idea of shrewdness, and of reserve except towards his owner or employer. Perhaps the supercargo notion predominated in this case, as Mr. Keckling's companion had a somewhat weather-worn face, and behind the ears and at the back of the neck that curious red bronzing which implies that the party so coloured has been a traveller, who has scorned pith hats, and other parasolic contrivances. Mr. Keckling had become the man of business again, and his speech was sharp and decisive, as in the old days.

"When did you land, Earnshaw?"

"Last night, at Folkestone."

"Why did you go to London?"

"Because Harris had not forwarded your letter saying where I should find you, sir."

A note, jotted on an envelope that lay at Mr. Keckling's hand, may not have betokened any access of good fortune to Mr. Harris.

"A good overland journey?"

"Much as usual—the time saved in one place lost in another. Yes, there was something wrong with the engine, and we wasted some hours doctoring it at Malta, and so missed the first train at Marseilles."

"Well, you found Rymer at Calcutta?"

"No. Oddly enough, he was being buried as we landed."

"Eh! dead? Who manages the business?"

"A nephew, who does not seem to know what he is about."

"And could do you no good?"

"I induced him to let me look at his uncle's books," said Mr. Earnshaw, quietly. And, indeed, he did look very much like the kind of person who would ransack the penetralia of a feeble-minded person's household while the latter was making up his feeble mind as to whether he should consent to the proceeding or not."

"And you had to go up the country?"

"To Allahabad."

"And now then?" said Mr. Keckling, eagerly, and leaning

forward. Earnshaw shook his head, as intimating that his news was unfavourable.

"As bad as we heard," said the old merchant, with a regret in his voice.

"Much worse than you were pleased to tell me, sir," said the other.

Mr. Keckling took no notice of the implied hint at reserve, but merely said,

"Let me hear what you learned."

"I have the dates and particulars, and names of persons who can be called as witnesses——"

"I knew you have, Earnshaw. You never forget anything that ought to be remembered. But tell me in half a dozen words, and we will look into details when necessary. Is Captain Armandale Spencer living?"

"He was when I left Allahabad. I don't mean that he was ill or anything; but up to that date I had knowledge of him."

"You saw him?"

"I was told that I had seen him, but there were four men in the carriage, and the Oriental dress makes everybody look alike."

"He wears the dress?"

He is one of them in dress, heart, soul, and damned rascality, begging your pardon for using the expression instead of choosing one. As for the officers, and the English, none of them speak to him; but I believe he has some acquaintances among the half-blood—I always forget the name—Euphrates——"

"Eurasians."

"It sounds a babyish word, to my thinking; but, being weak, it's the fitter for them, for a more helpless breed I never knew; and yet they can be spiteful, too."

"You did not take Spencer's character from them?"

"There's no mystery about his character, sir. He's a scoundrel. But what he may be doing, or what his intentions are, nobody seems to know."

"Perhaps he has none. He has established himself in the household of one of these wealthy natives, and while he is supplied by his patron with every means of enjoying himself in his wicked, debauched way, he cares for nothing else."

"That is not what people believe who have reason to know what they are talking about. He is as bad and depraved a man as you'll find in Asia, and that is saying a strong thing. But he has too much energy and brains to drop into a mere brute, like the men he lives with, and makes his tools. I don't know what to think, but you'll remember, sir, the affair that made so much noise, when a gang of forgers tried to rob all the banks in Europe at once."

"You don't mean that Spencer was in that?"

"No, sir, of course not. But it crossed my mind more than once whether some plot of that kind is not hatching. When you please to go into the papers, I'll show you why I think so."

"It may be so," said Mr. Keckling, unwilling to reject his trusty emissary's suggestion, but not inclined to accept it as worth much.

The conversation proceeded for some time, and the merchant elicited a more complete statement of the position of Armandale Spencer. He had, it appeared, from an early period of his sojourn in India, cast in his lot with the wealthier natives with whom he was brought into contact; and that he must have rendered them services which they were ready to reward lavishly, was obvious to all who knew the Asiatic nature. We have already been aware of his rapid accumulation of a fortune which, if not large, was infinitely larger than he could have honourably acquired, and we know how that fortune was lost. Mr. Keckling's information went to show that Spencer soon set himself to repair his loss, and that he was utterly careless as to what the world around him thought of his mode of effecting his object. For a long time, and while it was expedient, he had taken precautions to avoid palpable violations of the wholesome rules of the Indian service, in which was shown the most salutary jealousy of any over-intimacy between the the European and the Asiatic. But gradually, and as it became of less and less consequence to him to stand well with his legitimate associates and military superiors, the libertine and gambler became more reckless, and possibly in a time of sterner reckoning might have been called to a severe account. But it was at a period when a certain laxity prevailed, for reasons and under influences to which it is not within the province of the novelist to advert, and the talents of Armandale Spencer, his daring, and the good luck which these frequently bring, and which is often unphilosophically sundered from them by the observer, and treated as a mere accident, preserved him from what should have been the consequence of his irregularity. Ultimately, when scandals became more and more rife, and even the distance at which he usually sought to establish himself could not prevent them from being unpleasantly palpable to the authorities, Spencer availed himself of the first moment after he had completed the term that permitted him to retire from the Service, claimed his pension, and plunged without secrecy or hesitation into the society to which he had always attached himself. A musician, a facile linguist, a dexterous sportsman, and an unrestrained sensualist, Armandale Spencer found much acceptance in the households of the rich native gentlemen of his acquaintance, and at the petty courts with whose dusky sovereigns he occasionally chose to reside.

It is unnecessary, at this point of our story, to dwell upon the darker and more repulsive shades of Armandale Spencer's life. It is enough to say that before the Russian merchant (whose interest in Margaret Spencer had induced him to despatch Earnshaw for the purpose of either verifying or refuting suspicions which originally occurred to Mr. Keckling's mind after conversations with Aunt Henrietta in her less guarded moments) there was laid a picture which would simply have excited the contempt of the upright and honourable old gentleman, had there been no Margaret in existence, but which, when he thought of the ex-officer as the father of the innocent and beautiful girl, inspired Mr. Keckling with indignation. I regret to add that this Englishman's mind was so lamentably unconstitutional, that he actually regretted that the *régime* under which he had passed so

many years of his life had no power in India. He deplored the fact that there was no Czar to whom he could cause influential representations to be made, and who, upon being induced to see the necessities of the case, would with three written words have doomed a life to be dragged to its end in a Siberian cavern. As this was, luckily for Armandale Spencer, out of the question, Mr. Keckling was compelled to devote his cares to the benefit of the daughter instead of to the chastisement of the father.

But there was another member of the family to be inquired after, and whose history Mr. Keckling's envoy had also made it his business to follow out, so far as he could do so, with the aid of clues furnished by the Calcutta house to which Earnshaw had been accredited. It will be remembered by those who have done the author the honour of accompanying him through his narration, that Armandale Spencer made a hasty marriage with a very young lady, whose prettiness appeared to the wondering world (from which he was not then excluded) her only recommendation, and that in a short time, and just before Margaret was sent to England, Mrs. Armandale Spencer had left the house of her husband for that of a clever member of the Civil Service. The Russian merchant desired to know whether Margaret had still a mother.

It is not, of course, to be supposed that Margaret's old friend was the only person who had made such inquiries. Mrs. Spencer, of Gower-street, had, as was natural, been called upon for any information of which she, as Armandale's correspondent, might be the depository, and she had given the readiest and most frank answers, which, addressed to persons without suspicion, and without the habit of falsehood, had been received as satisfactory. She had declared, unhesitatingly, that poor Mrs. Armandale Spencer had died (the particulars of the complaint and the patient's dying words being given with feminine minuteness, if with occasional feminine variation) within a few months after parting with her darling child. She had further declared that her gallant brother-in-law was perpetually moving about in a most responsible office at the most distant part of India, and that he had desired all communications to be addressed to his Calcutta agents, so that his receiving them was very uncertain. It never occurred to anybody to question the truth of a very probable story, and therefore it was received as matter of course. I should like to know anybody who has not for years accepted some solution of a domestic question, simply because the possibility of deceit never suggested itself, and who, when suspicion lit up a chink, and afterwards the bull's-eye light of "the real truth, my dear," broke out, has not been unjustly accused of mole-sightedness for not having found it all out a long time ago. Mr. Tompkins, sir, for seven whole years, at banquet and at ball, have you beheld those diamonds sparkling in your lady's ear, and you look complacently at them, for her ears are very pretty, and what more natural than those jewels should have been given to Arabella (as she says) by her dear uncle, just before he sailed away to Monté Video, to be lost on the voyage? Mrs. Stephens, madam, it is exceedingly nice and kind of you to have that little orphan girl, your husband's *protégée*, home at your house for the holidays, and to take

her to the pantomime, and to send her a cake now and then, and a velvet-covered Church Service, and your husband is a very humane creature to have taken charge (as he says) of the child of a poor client of his who died of a broken heart caused by a Chancery suit, out of which, as Stephens jollily adds, he really made some good costs, so can afford to keep the child, though he don't see much in her. Uncle! client! Eh, you are very clever people, but I know what I know.

But Mr. Keckling did not feel so certain of the truth of all that Mrs. Henrietta said, especially since, as hath been hinted, she varied her narrative, and slew Mrs. Armandale sometimes with consumption, sometimes with the result of an accident, and once by a falling-in of a minaret. And, having a very deep and sincere affection for Margaret, the old merchant, whose Russian habits let little stand in the way of his endeavouring to acquire anything that he wanted, if gold would buy it, said nothing, but wrote from time to time to an old Indian correspondent to collect information, and then despatched a confidential agent to take up the threads and complete the investigation. He found out, as we have seen, that Margaret had a father living. Mr. Keckling certainly thought it most probable that Mrs. Armandale Spencer was dead, although the Henriettian story of her death was multifarious. But he decided on inquiring, nevertheless, and the result was that the lady was discovered not only to be alive, but to be prosperous, if the word can fitly be applied to one who was living in splendid iniquity.

There was one person in England, all the time, who could, had she pleased, have enlightened all parties interested in Mrs. Spencer's history. But she was, in the first place, out of London, and, in the next, had been impressed by Captain Spencer (when hurrying her and his child of four years old on board the home-bound vessel) with the conviction that even to remember a scene that she had witnessed—a missing mistress, servants in terror of a master who was menacing them with Gehenna unless they answered questions—a household in disorder—and a day of scandal, chase, and tears,—would be an act of treachery to her little lady. Poor Boosey would have defied the question as resolutely as poor Beatrice Cenci; nay, more nobly, for the Italian bore agony for the honour of her own house and kindred, the Indian would have endured any torment for the child of an alien and infidel master.

Mr. Earnshaw had, however, rendered any reference to the ayah as unnecessary as it would have been unavailing. He had got upon the trail in the case of Mrs. Armandale. The intellectual civilian who, sixteen years before, had not been intellectual enough to resist the fascinations of an ivory forehead, liquid blue eyes, rosy lips, and golden hair, had, something more than fifteen years before, discovered that these charms (to which, if you are interested in the matter, you may add a lithe and graceful figure and a languishing manner, that almost amounted to personal flattery of the intended victim), were at least balanced—he had a mathematical mind, and reckoned up things—by pardonable ignorance and culpable selfishness. In India, it is difficult for any lady, who is in the possession of wealth, to avoid making dress her business, in the enforced idleness of the climate: but Mrs.

Spencer made the outward adorning herself not merely her business, but her religion. Nobody had taught her any other. It is a creed that rich men, or men who do not care about being rich, may tolerate in their wives; but the intellectual civilian intended to take a fortune to England, and had no mind to let it be wasted on the milliners of Calcutta, for the amusement of a lady who was not his wife. In short, the ivory forehead, and the other attractions, soon lost their power; and intellect resumed its sway. Husband and lover had exchanged shots—or their seconds said they had—but the former brought no action against the latter; and very odd things were said, during the early morning drives, by persons who really had no concern with the subject. They also wondered what Mrs. Armandale Spencer would do when the civilian recovered his senses.

It is scarcely more our business than it was theirs to inquire. We may be quite sure that a fool who has made a false step will not recover it; though a wise man's stumble is often the happiest thing for him. Mrs. Armandale was not likely to repent her sin, and hide herself in retirement to ascertain whether repentance meant anything except discontent. The intellectual civilian had not behaved unlike a gentleman, otherwise than in breaking up a household and depriving a baby of its mother; and he made a liberal, if not lavish, provision for her. Perhaps, had he behaved worse, there would have been more chance of her reformation; but he gave her enough to maintain a position, and to gather round her a knot of associates who would take care, for the sake of their own enjoyments, that Mrs. Spencer did not worry herself with a thought like that which Mrs. Quickly so earnestly recommended the dying Falstaff to postpone. Such society can be obtained in almost any part of the Devil's Walk, and in Calcutta as elsewhere.

Mrs. Armandale bore the climate exceedingly well. Selfish and unexcitable people are the best citizens of the world, for every place agrees with them, if they can only get all they want. The sixteen years of her life, after her separation from Captain Spencer, passed lightly over her: and though the face had long lost its girlish loveliness, and womanly expression had not succeeded to the expired charm, the features remained unsharpened and pretty; and the form, instead of attenuating, became rounder and more voluptuous. Those who knew her at this time, always spoke of her to me as "very nice to look at." It is not, perhaps, the highest praise that can be awarded to created woman, but numbers of created women act as if the attaining it were the topmost height of their ambition—an achievement that silences your Excelsior.

I do not wish to recount all that Mr. Earnshaw had to tell to his employer about this unhappy woman, nor should I have introduced her history but for the exigency of the narrative. Mr. Keckling himself, though much too practical a man to decline to receive any particle of information that could be afforded him by anybody, cut the scandalous chronicle rather short, only requiring to be exactly certified as to the position of Mrs. Armandale at the time of his inquiry. "As the husband is, the wife is," writes one of the great poets of our time; and the imperishable truth that makes the poem



—the spark of the coal from off the altar—is in the line. I have told you that Armandale Spencer had forgotten his position, his nation, and the creed into which he had been baptized, and was living a life of luxurious vice. For some five years the heart, and soul, and nature of a young wife had been in his hands, to be moulded for good or evil—nay, he had deliberately assumed the charge; the man of thirty-four had wooed and wedded the child of eighteen. How he had discharged it may best and least offensively be told in telling that, when her apprenticeship was over, she imitated her master so far as her scantier brain would allow. A rich Pagan had been sufficiently enlightened by Christian example to discard any prejudices against a *liaison* with one of a different faith; and the wife of Armandale Spencer was not likely to be more bigoted than her tawny admirer.

So good Keckling went back to the beautiful girl he had left in Anemone Lodge, taking with him this knowledge of the history of her parents.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A PATIENT.

ALBAN CHERITON returned to town, and struggled to forget the severest humiliation he had ever received. The proud man was wounded to the very heart. Not only had his earnest love been rejected, but he had been compelled to experience a sense of inferiority to those whom his reason told him, and truthfully, were not his equals. He had been schooled by a girl whom but, as it seemed, the other day he was teaching to read. He had been made to feel that in the social scale he, with all his intellect, knowledge, and power, weighed lighter than a frivolous and idle young worldling. The word reminds us that his religious principles should now have come to his aid. Perhaps, as they did not do so, we may have hastily assumed that he possessed any. We may have taken for granted that they would be the result of a religious education. We may see.

One evening towards dusk, a few days after his return from Ryde, Mr. Cheriton was in his private room, engaged in study. An empty skull before him was giving a lesson to a full one, and the student was intently occupied in testing the theory of a phrenological writer whose work he held. After some time, there came a witness to his occupation, but one who abstained from disturbing him until he laid down the book, which he could then hardly see to read, and threw himself back in his chair for consideration. Then, to his surprise, he was addressed by name. A lady, very quietly dressed, and with a veil over the upper part of her face, was his companion.

Recovering rapidly from his surprise, Alban said a few words of apology, and regret that the servant had not attended to announce her. Had she been kept waiting long?

"My time is of no consequence, and you were making such good use of yours that I could not think of interrupting you," said a voice that was pleasant, and yet, as it struck Alban, rather forced in its cheerfulness. He was about to ring for lights, when his visitor said—

"If you will be so good as to delay the light until it is necessary I shall be glad, for my eyes suffer in it."

She crossed the room, and took a seat upon a couch at its further end. It was scarcely the act of a patient with a confidence to make.

"I am not exactly afraid of that skull, but still if you would put it out of the way I should prefer it."

"By all means," said Alban, removing it.

"Thank you. What an advantage men have over women!"

"Do you think they have? Do you mean in not being afraid of skulls?"

"No, I mean in being able to relieve their minds, when they are in trouble, by settling to some pursuit that distracts them. We cannot do that—the trouble comes back to us every minute, and seems to try to worry us into madness."

"You are not speaking of your own case, I hope?" said Alban.

"Never mind about that. I am at all events speaking of yours."

"Mine?" said Alban, with a slight laugh.

"Yes, certainly. Will you tell me that you have not been in great trouble and distress of mind within the last week?"

"A curious question. But may I remind you that a professional man's time has many calls upon it. Your visit——"

"There, there. I am not come for physic, nor for advice—at least, I think not. But don't turn me out. O, I am not come on a begging errand neither. I have not got a father at home who is a clergyman, and who must pawn his Bible for food if you do not relieve him, and I have not seen better days, and my poor mother was not a friend of your father's, and I am not a governess turned into the street for repulsing the attentions of my employer. I know what you think a woman in a veil, who calls at dusk and does not give her name, must be."

"You must pardon my rudeness," said Alban, who was in no humour to be talked to, "if I ask you the object of your call."

"But you ought to answer me first. I asked you whether you had not been in great trouble of mind; which you forget in hard reading."

"If you wish to know whether hard reading will produce forgetfulness——"

"Whether you have found it do so," persisted the stranger.

"We never reveal professional confidences," said Alban. "But, once more, what occasions your visit to me?"

"I hardly know. Perhaps you will be able to tell me. When did you return from the Isle of Wight? Now, then, how did she know that I had been in the Isle of Wight, when I told the people here that I was going to Shropshire? Because she saw you at Ryde—there."

"Either, madam, I have the pleasure of speaking to a friend whom I do not recognise, or all this is, shall I say——"



*The Patient.*



"Impertinent ! But we all say impertinent things at times. Even a grave medical man can leave his patients, and run away to say impertinent things to a young lady on Ryde pier. To be sure, he got as good as he brought, and a little better ; and so he had to run back again, and comfort himself with books and skulls."

Here Alban rang the bell angrily.

"Is that to tell them to put me into the street ?"

"It is that I may see my visitor."

"Please don't, please don't," said the lady, earnestly. "I will tell you who I am, and everything, directly. Please not to order the lights yet."

"Why was this lady not announced to me ?" said Alban, to the servant. "How dare you keep visitors waiting in the hall ? Lights when I ring next."

"She deserved a scolding," said the lady ; "but not for keeping me waiting, because she had left the door ajar, and I walked in. She had only just stepped out, of course, as they all say ; and a bachelor knows no better. If you had married your cousin, Miss Margaret, she would have kept better order in your house for you. Now, are you not in a rage ?"

"Not the slightest," replied the young surgeon. "But I must now know who it is that has a right to speak on such subjects."

"I do not know that I have a right. Perhaps you will think that I have none. But if it will make you more ready to listen to me, I may as well tell you that I know a good deal ; and, among other things, I know everything that passed between you and your cousin on the pier."

"Go on, at your pleasure, madam," said Alban, sternly.

"How did she know that ? Either Margaret must have told her, or Margaret must have told Mr. Arundel, and he has repeated it ; and I will kill him. No, you mustn't. It was in neither of these ways that I learned it."

"There could be but one other," said Alban, who could not resist an impulse to speak, "and that was by listening."

"And that *was* the way," said his visitor.

"And your object, madam ?"

"It had nothing to do with you—don't imagine a new conquest."

"In that case, why am I told of it ?" said the young surgeon, disregarding the flippant conclusion of her speech.

The next moment it pleased his visitor to sob heavily, and then to go into severe, but not noisy hysterics. To order in lights was now Alban's obvious course ; and as he administered the remedies usual in such cases, he found that he was tending a young lady, who was unknown to him, and whose features, agreeable rather than handsome, seemed to have been drawn and sharpened by suffering of some kind. Her eyelids were swollen with weeping, and her eyes, which might have appeared fine under other circumstances, had little lustre except what sparkled in the tears with which they were now charged. She was evidently trying to master the affection which had thus suddenly seized her, and put away Alban's hand with an apologetic gesture.

"Only leave me alone," she said, in a piteous voice. "I shall be better directly, and then I will go away."

After a few minutes, she began to express her sorrow for having thus yielded to her feelings, and was gathering her mantle around her, as if to depart, shivering as she did so; when Alban said—

"Nay, nay, you are not yet prepared to go. Give your nerves fair play; and take this." And he brought her a glass of wine.

"Very nice wine," she said, after tasting it. And the remark seemed so curiously placed that even Alban could not help being amused.

"You are a judge, then," he said, "for I know it is very good."

"I have tasted a good deal in my time," said the girl, finishing the glass. "I did not think that I should have been such a fool. I beg your pardon."

"Ask a doctor's pardon for being ill—what are you thinking about?"

"I am all right again, now. And now you want to know who I am?"

"If you think proper to tell me."

"Why are men such hypocrites? You are full of curiosity to know, but you think it is dignified to speak like that."

It was clear to Alban that she approached the truth with reluctance, and was inclined to avail herself of any incidental remark to delay her explanation. So he remained silent.

"You are a medical man, and accustomed to hear all sorts of things," she said; "but then you are a religious man, and I am afraid of shocking you. No, I will write you a letter."

"Far better to speak."

"And you want be shocked?"

"Not easily."

"What's the reason that Miss Spencer will not marry you?"

"If you know what you pretend to know, the question is idle."

"Pretend! Who stood on Ryde pier and compared himself to a poor sailor struggling in the waters within sight of home, and being drowned at last, and who was told not to think of such horrors, but to fancy the boat pulling off and saving him, and his wife kissing him for joy?"

"Yes, you either heard, or have heard of a conversation."

"I heard it, I tell you, so do not be afraid that your secrets have been betrayed. A miserable woman, crouching in a corner behind a boat, was easily overlooked in the twilight, but she was there."

"As friend or enemy?"

"I cared nothing about you. But I wished that ten times the insults you received had been heaped and showered upon you, and had driven you wild, and then in your rage if you had seized the other person who was with you, and flung her away into the ocean, I would have fallen down and worshipped you."

For a moment or two Alban stood in silent bewilderment. Not more, for he had loved, and his instincts had received that strange, but certain quickening which such experience brings.

"No one can hate Miss Spencer for her own sake," said he. "I suppose that I understand you?"

"But I *do* hate her for her own sake," returned the other, vehemently. "Who is she that no one is to be allowed to say they hate her? You need not fight her battles. She is quite able to take care of herself. A girl who lived in a common lodging-house, and yet can manage to entrap a gentleman and the son of a member of Parliament into marrying her, she not having a penny in the world to bless herself with, does not stand in need of your defence, or anybody else's."

"Most improper language," said Alban. He detested the woman before him for daring to speak with vulgar injustice of Margaret, and yet there was some thought—some lurking hope that he might hear what in some way could be gain to him—that prevented his silencing and dismissing his visitor. "Unjust and improper language."

"*She* is so just, is she not? Forcing herself into a family so far superior to her, and spoiling the fortunes of a man on whom his relations perfectly doted. That is so just! As to its being improper to say so, I told you that you would be shocked, and of course you are, but it is none the less true for all that."

"Why do you come here to say this to me?"

"I don't know. Yes, I tell falsehoods. I do know, Mr. Cheriton. I heard what passed on the pier, and I heard that girl lavish her ungrateful insults upon you. I know what you feel, or what a man, if he has a heart in his bosom, ought to feel, at such treatment. And I came here with a sort of hope that you might not be content to lie down quiet, like a beaten dog, but might do something to show that you were not to be treated in that way with impunity."

Alban's lip curled for a moment in disdain at the idea of such words having any effect upon him, save that of rousing his contempt. And then came a touch of pity for one who was showing how real were her feelings by the transparency of her appeal.

"You are young," he said, "too young to deserve the grief which you are undergoing."

"I am not young," she answered, petulantly. "I am twenty, and I feel a hundred."

"I must not inquire into your troubles. I may guess at them, but that is all I can do. But let me try to impress upon you that brooding over them, and thinking of revenge on people, is not a good way to find peace of mind and health."

"Who was talking of my troubles?" returned the girl. "I was speaking of yours, and you begin to preach to me. I don't want to be preached to. No, you have been very kind, and I beg your pardon again. I believe that I am going mad. How is it, and what is the matter, when things that happened yesterday seem a thousand years ago, and words that you have heard, kind words, months back, come ringing into your ears as if the person who said them had just spoken, and when you would give the world that some great stone should suddenly crush your head and extinguish all your cares in an instant? Do you know anything about that, or do they put it in the doctors' books?"

"You ought not to have known it, poor child, and the Devil will have a reckoning with those who have taught you so much."

"Just now you flew into a rage because I called her names."

"Why try to deceive yourself and me? My relative is about to marry a person in whom you have had an interest—that is the case. She is blameless in the matter—you best know whether the other person is so."

"She is not blameless, and in your heart you do not think so, though of course it is not for you, a haughty gentleman, to own to me that your relative, as you call her, has done wrong. But what right had she to step out of her station, and lay herself out to entrap her superior?"

"How can you presume to say such a thing? Her station is equal to that of any other lady—but I cannot argue such a matter with you. I can only excuse myself for talking about it for a moment, because I wish to guide you into the right course. Now we will end the discussion, as you are quite well enough to go out."

"Do not turn me out of the house," said the girl, looking hurt. "I have not been accustomed to be treated unkindly; but, perhaps, you are right, and I ought to learn to be treated so."

"Nothing could be further from my meaning," said Alban; "and pray believe it." He could not but feel compassionately for the impulsive, untaught being before him, and he endeavoured to remove the impression which her hasty nature had received. He asked her a few questions about her health, and gave her a few general directions, rather to make her feel that he was kindly disposed towards her than with any idea that he was arresting her attention. And he was right enough in his surmise that his counsel was not being much heeded; for in the midst of a special suggestion to her against unnecessary excitement, she suddenly interrupted him—

"O! break off this marriage—break it off, if you have any mercy in you! You are too proud to do it on your own account, though you would give your life to see Philip Arundel lying dead upon the floor. Break it off for mine!"

"You talk wildly, girl."

"I know it. I feel wildly—I think wildly. I know that I shall be dragged away to a cold cell in Bedlam some day soon, poor me! But I know what I am talking about. Do you think that Margaret Spencer would marry Arundel unless she thought he loved her beyond all earthly things, and had never loved another?"

"How many minutes ago were you speaking of that lady?—"

"That lady!—that lady!" the girl repeated, stamping impatiently.

"I repeat, how many minutes ago were you imputing an unworthy desire to marry where you think she ought not? You can answer your own question."

"O! will you argue with a poor, half-frenzied woman as if she were rational, and weighed her words? Never mind what I said, but help me."

"How?"

"You know Margaret—there, let me be respectful and humble, then. You know Miss Spencer. She believes Arundel's whole soul



is hers, and that he never cared for any one else. If her eyes were opened, she would break off the match—if I said different, it was only woman's spite—I believe she would, and so would I, if I were a good girl, God help me, and in her place. If she were to read one of a hundred letters which I could show her, there would be an end of everything."

"Is that so?" said Alban, mechanically.

"Letters in which he pours out his love and his fondness, and talks of his perfect happiness and bliss—and they are not addressed to Miss Spencer, mind that!"

"Well," said Alban.

"I know what is in your head," she went on. "Why has not this woman sent the letters to my cousin Margaret? Because I knew what she would do with them. She would not read them, but would either burn them, or return them, or hand them to him as a proof of her confidence."

"This would be the act of the mean, intriguing——"

"O don't—don't. Do you think I do not feel how good she is, how worthy to be loved? But she shall not be loved by him. All the world shall be free to her but him. It is wicked that he should deceive her, as he is doing,—very wicked. Will you not interfere and save her, you who love her, or say you love her, so dearly? Your pride, O! your pride! You know me, and despise me. You could save your cousin—perhaps win her for yourself. But it must not be done. I see that it will not be done. You are too proud to save her from ruin and misery, because I point out the way."

"You have pointed out no way," said Alban, agitated.

"See that she reads—reads with her own eyes—three letters, and she is saved."

There was cunning in the girl's next act. She crossed to the door, pointed to the sofa on which she had been sitting, and was out of the house almost in less time than it takes to tell it. And on the sofa lay, not a packet, but a number of separate letters, some half open. It would have been difficult even to take them up and put them together without seeing some of the contents.

The young surgeon, after a moment or two, put away the decanter and wine-glass which he had brought out for the relief of his patient, and taking a drawer, swept into it, with one movement, all the papers she had left, replaced and locked the drawer, drew the candles to him, and resumed his study of the skull. He believed that he had got himself well in hand; and, so far as outward appearances went, he had certainly achieved that victory. But I doubt whether, upon that evening, he grappled with his theme closely enough to enable him to add much to his stock of phrenological knowledge. I think his speculations strayed from heads to hearts. Both, however, are legitimate subjects of medical investigation.

## CHAPTER XX.

## AN EXPERIMENT.

"WE had returned to London" (wrote Margaret, after circumstances, which will be described in their place, had strangely varied the fortunes of those of whom we have spoken) "towards the close of autumn, and I remember that the weather was so soft and beautiful that I was able to be a good deal in the large garden of Mr. Keckling's house. He came out to me one day, while I was staying with him (for I never went back to live in Gower-street), seated himself under a tree, and sat watching his large white cat,—who had made great friends with me,—so long and intently, that I could not help taking notice of it. I remember, too, that the day I am going to mention was Sunday, from the most ridiculous little circumstance. Dear old Mr. Keckling had a favourite joke about his cat. Her name, on week days, was Tib; but he used to say, gravely, that on Sunday everything should be fine and genteel, so, on Sundays, puss was elevated to the dignity of Tilburina. And he would solemnly quote to her bits from some play, and ask her whether she saw the Spanish fleet, whether she still retained the idea that a whale was a bird, and what she had further to advance about the oyster that was unfortunate in love; and say all sorts of funny little things to her, reproving her for her rudeness in winking in reply. The day I speak of I recollect he addressed his pet by her short name, and I set him right, reminding him what day it was. I was so happy in those days that I had time to notice every little thing that amused me; and sometimes I made memorandums of such nonsense in my diary that when I look at them, I seem to wonder whether the hand that turns the leaves is the same hand that wrote such things.

"I did not write down the conversation we had that day, but I have a very strong recollection of it, because my own position at the time naturally made any story like that he told me very interesting indeed.

"Mr. Keckling asked me to come and sit down by him, as he had something to read that might amuse me. He took out a letter, and read a few words. I do not recollect them exactly, but they were something like this:—'*The perplexity of the poor young bride increases every day, and is becoming a sorrow, which injures her good looks. Nobody except myself, who am in her secret, can guess at the reason, as there is everything to make her happy. I wish you would manage to see her, and counsel her.*' There was some more, describing her house, and other matters, but I did not take so much notice of this.

"'Yes, it is a curious affair,' he said, after reading the letter. 'I should like to hear what you would say about it. The lady referred to is the daughter of a valued old friend of mine, and I should be glad to advise her for good if I could.'

"'A bride,' I said. 'You never told me that any friend of yours was being married. Did you send her a present?'



*An Experiment.*



" 'Eh?' he said. 'No, no. In fact,' he added, after a pause, 'it was a run-away sort of business. All right and proper, but nobody was consulted. If I make up my mind to give her a present I shall take your opinion on it. But that is not the point now. The poor little thing is in great trouble as to what she ought to do.'

"He waited a little while without speaking. I fancied that he was considering whether he would tell me the story or not. Then he said—

" 'It was what you young ladies call a love-match. Neither party has any money; but he—the husband—is—is the heir to an estate and title, so that if they can carry on the war in the meantime—which I dare say friends will aid them to do—it will be a good marriage for my little friend. She is a fair-haired little thing, half a head shorter than you, and won't look at all dignified when she becomes a baronet's lady; but that does not matter.'

"I made some laughing answer, and he went on.

" 'But the fact is, that there is a skeleton in the family. I don't want to speak to you of disagreeable matters, but to make you understand the situation of the girl, I must just tell you that my old friend, her father, made a mistake in his choice of a wife, and that her mother turned out a worthless person, from whom he had to be separated. It has been the custom in the family to speak of her as what we all wish she were—namely, dead, and buried. But she is living, and this has been always known by Bessy (that's her name); and, indeed, she has had to send money and other things to her mother from time to time.'

"I listened, of course, with all possible interest.

" 'Well, it seems likely, from circumstances that we have heard of, that this bad woman will come forward, and that the young husband will learn of her existence.'

" 'But,' I said, I think hastily, I know I felt astonished, 'do you mean that the young lady did not make her husband aware of her position before engaging herself to him?'

" 'Why, no,' said Mr. Keckling; and I remember that I was rather surprised at the cool tone in which he spoke of the concealment, as if it had been a matter of choice whether the truth should be spoken or not. 'No, she did not—acting probably under advice from female friends.'

" 'Dear Mr. Keckling—do female friends advise a woman how to behave to —'

" 'To the man who has her heart? You are right, my dear; but people see things in different ways.'

" 'And she loved this gentleman?'

" 'Yes. I really believe she loved him earnestly, and that might be one reason why she withheld her secret from him.'

" 'But why should she do that?' I asked.

" 'Why, my dear, you have happily lived in the kind of society where some sorts of wrongs and wickednesses are never even talked about, but you may know that there is a very strong feeling against marriage with the daughter of a *divorcée*. Some folks unkindly say that there is always something of the mother in the child.'

“ ‘How wicked ! How cruelly wicked !’

“ ‘Well, my dear, it may be so. Perhaps they misunderstand the second commandment, and forget that it is not for *them* to visit the sins of parents on children. But be this as it may, such is the feeling ; and then there are heaps of kinder people, who know perfectly well that it is the education, and not the birth, that makes the child, but who, though they would repel the idea of being unjust, would object to union with a family in which there had been a scandal, and a story for chatter, and whisper, and gossip.’

“ ‘I can understand that very well,’ I said ; ‘and all this seems to me to have made it still more the duty of this poor young lady to take care that her intended husband was aware of the circumstances.’

“ ‘But I think it possible that such a revelation might have broken off the match ; and you see she loved him, and, moreover, it was a good match for her.’

“ ‘Dear Mr. Keckling, you are not speaking seriously, I know.’

“ ‘Why, after all, she has done him no particular harm. She is a good girl, and will make him a right good wife, and knows she will, and means to do it. Could one expect her to break her heart and lose her chances because some people are, as you say, wicked and cruel, and some are genteel and weak ?’

“ ‘I have a good mind to scold you for your Jesuitism, sir, only you are laughing all the time.’

“ ‘Indeed I am not, my dear. I never felt more seriously in my life. I want your advice for my little friend.’

“ ‘I am sure I would not judge her—I do not know how she may have been taught, or how weak her nature may be—I will not venture to condemn her. But I cannot help feeling that she has done so wrong and sinful a thing that I dare not think she will escape suffering and punishment. Dear Mr. Keckling, what should be done ?’

“ ‘You would tell her, then—I mean, if you two young girls were shut up together in secret conference—you would tell her that in your mind she had done very wrong.’

“ ‘O, if she is really—if she has learned what duty means—there would be no need to tell her that, poor thing. She must be humbled to the dust.’

“ ‘Proud child ! Womanly dignity, eh ? Taking a husband under false pretences.’

“ ‘Yes, sir, there is that,’ I said ; and I know I coloured up with a sort of indignation. ‘That thought will be bitter humiliation to her worldly pride as long as she lives. But there is a graver and sadder thing. If we were together—and I am sure that if you think I can do her any good I will go to her, or she shall come to me, you know that—if we were together, I hope that though she can never forgive herself, she would let me join her in asking forgiveness from One who is never besought in vain.’

“ ‘It was not often that I spoke so earnestly to Mr. Keckling, or on any religious subject. It was not that he ever seemed disinclined to such matters, but it appeared presumptuous in me, a girl of nineteen, to pretend to teach a good old man, who was always doing me and

others some kindness, and always living a life of charity and benevolence. I know very well, and I have read in books and tracts, that some think differently, and urge that it is the duty of young persons who believe that they have the truth, to press it in season and out of season upon elders and superiors whom they believe to be without it, but I feel that I was never made for a teacher, except where any one loves me very much, and will let me whisper any little word in my own weak way. But upon this occasion Mr. Keckling so insisted on my answer, that I think it would have been to show myself ashamed of religion had I not spoken as I did.

“‘Then,’ he said, taking my hand, ‘you see in this girl’s concealment of the truth, a shame, regarded in a worldly view, and a sin against God?’

“‘Indeed, sir, I do. Pray do not think I set myself up as a judge, but I have been taught——’

“‘That will do, my love, I quite comprehend you, and now that you have told me your opinion so frankly, I will tell you that mine is entirely the same, and that Bessy, knowing what she did, ought to have either told her lover, or let so painful a duty be done by a friend. She might have lost the man she loved.’

“‘Do you think she would, unless she had misplaced her love?’ I said, without looking up. I dare say I coloured again.

“‘Man’s love and woman’s are two things, my dear. He might be very fond of her, and no doubt he was and is, but a baronet expectant, let him be never so devoted, might find time to recollect that Providence has placed him in a situation of responsibility and example, and that he owes a duty to society, and must not violate its prejudices; and then there are mothers, and aunts, and sisters, and so on—perhaps expectations—and reasonable concession to the feelings of one’s family is what they have a right to require.’

“‘If that is the sort of affection which the poor young lady has secured, at the price of the sacrifice of her self-respect,’ I said, ‘I fear she is more to be pitied than we supposed.’

“I do not remember that we talked any more upon the subject. I have a very abiding recollection of the principal part of the conversation, and as I am asked to write it down as fully as I can, I have done so, and if I have not used the very words that were spoken, I have faithfully given their spirit. Nor did Mr. Keckling encourage me to renew the subject. Once or twice, I asked him whether he had anything to tell me about the young lady of whom we had spoken, and his answer implied that all was going on well, but he did not desire to enter into particulars. I hope and trust that he was not deceived, and that my being asked to write out the conversation is not the consequence of any unhappy issue of the matter. It will be very kind if I am allowed to know that it is not.”

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That is the end of Margaret’s record of a conversation that occurred, as she has said, late in the autumn. For our story must advance more rapidly than I could desire over its pleasanter periods.

I have much to tell, and but such space to tell it in as must be husbanded with care. Had I ampler room and verge enough, we would linger with Margaret and her lover on the sea-shore, and, of course unseen, listen to love's vows, and flatteries, and playfulnesses, and murmurs, and whispers, and note its delightful silences, and the sudden meeting of eyes and smiles that end those pauses, and bid the gentle cycle of tenderness to begin again its never-wearying round. They looked very well, that young couple, I can tell you, as they walked about performing courtship, and you lose a treat through my inability to exhibit them to your notice. Then I could have set forth, with elaboration, how, when they returned to town, there was a house to be chosen, and I suppose that there is not a more prettily suggestive sight than that of a pair of lovers house-hunting, with Propriety accompanying them, but always finding itself discreetly tired to death in a down-stairs apartment, and sitting down in the midst thereof on a dusty chair without a back, while they explore drawing-rooms and the rest of it, and consider whether that will be a good place for setting up the human Lares and divine Penates. But I can only mention that a house was taken, and that it was in the Wood of Saint John. I write was—for houses are not built to stand, but to let. The architect is dispensed with by the greedy builder, who keeps, chained up in his cellar, some wretched student of the art, and bids for employment by the stingy would-be houseowner by offering to save him architect's fees, and to furnish plans by the creature in the cellarage. Then do folks wonder that builders' houses are vile to the spectator, incommodious to the inhabitant, lucrative to the coroner. I answer for the existence of none of such houses unless I have seen them within the year, and it is longer since I saw the abode taken by Philip Arundel. At the time, he and Margaret admired it much; and after their first visit of inspection brought away on the eye an impression of elegance and colour, a result craftily obtained by the proprietor, who had inserted some stained-glass on the staircase, and some vine-leaves in brass-work on the garden-gate. Note, ye house-owners, who are so stupid as not to know it, that it is a little bait like this that often lets houses to young folks, and also to older ones. The house was taken, and Philip, in his lovely *abandon*, was eager to give it a name, and wanted to call it the Casket, because of its being about to contain his jewel; and Pearl Villa, because Margaret means a Pearl; and Spencer Lodge, for a yet more obvious and absurd reason; but these follies were overruled, and the place retained its unpretending numeral on the brass-bound wicket.

It was not intended that Philip should be an idle man. He did not even intend it himself. On the contrary, though Mr. Arundel (who furnished the house from blacking-brush to Broadwood) arranged to make the young couple a handsome allowance, it was understood that Philip was to pursue his profession in earnest. The respectable firm of Arundel and Claxton was to be dissolved; Jack Claxton himself representing that if Philip meant business, it could not be carried on under the peculiar system that always let in beer and shut out strangers. Philip was to take briefs whenever he could get them, and the A. and C. arrangements were not exactly calculated to impress



upon unimaginative solicitors that a great advocate lurked behind the perpetually-closed black door, awaiting occupation. So another set of chambers was taken for Philip, and these were down in a cellar in the Temple, so situate that passers-by could look upon and into the window, and see the industrious barrister toiling at his calfskins and briefs; a spectacle which it was justly thought would inspire confidence. The young lawyer was to decide upon rising in his profession, and making a handsome income, "and then," said old Mr. Arundel, looking wistfully at his handsome son, "one of these days we must see whether those Shackleby gentlemen would like to exchange old lamps for new ones."

"The exchange would be about as lucky for them as it was for the princess in the story," said Philip.

"You vain thing," said Geraldine. "Do you mean that you think you should carry the House away?"

"No, he did not mean that," said Margaret, immediately putting in a plea for him, whereat both the girls broke out into their merry laughs, in which she joined the next moment, with some little accession of colour.

"We spoil him, dear," said Blanche, "and we rather look to you to be severe with him for his good."

"O, I *will* be dreadful," said Margaret, "only we must be just, you know, and Philip did mean that Shackleby would lose sadly by such a change."

"Well, I think he did, my love," said Mr. Arundel, who had grown very fond of her. "But if he could always have you by his side to interpret his speeches for him, I don't know that Geraldine's notion might not be carried out."

"I won't have my father flattering you," said Philip, in a low voice to Margaret, as he drew her to a window. "That is my business, and I will not allow any intruders."

"He is so kind," said Margaret. "See." And she held out her pretty hand, on one finger of which was a ring Philip had not seen there before.

"Ah," he said, "it was my mother's. That shows how he loves you—and you deserve that he should, dearest," he added, kissing the finger, and pressing the hand.

"It is I who am to be spoiled," said Margaret, smiling affectionately.

This little scene took place the day after that of the conversation with Mr. Keckling which Margaret has written down for us. It will easily be divined that the sentiments which he contrived to elicit from her on that occasion, and the firmness with which she avowed them, produced a strong impression on his mind. The imaginary story which he had framed was a device which may have been suggested to him by some of his experience of diplomatic police in Russia, where strange ways are adopted of arriving at people's views, ascertaining their characters, and giving them hints for their guidance. The result had made it perfectly clear to Mr. Keckling what would be Margaret's course if the slightest portion of Earnshaw's information should reach her? The old man pondered a good

deal on the subject, and naturally enough arrived at the conclusion that his course was to let events take theirs.

"She shall marry him," he said, "in her innocence of the history of her family, and she shall have nothing to reproach herself with. I can testify to her utter ignorance of the story of her father and mother, if, hereafter, any one who looks her in the face can dare to doubt her. And if——"

The rest was muttered so low, that even Tib, who was purring on his lap in acknowledgment of her master's attention in pulling her great thick tail, could hardly have heard it; but I believe it was something about a resolution to protect Margaret against the Enemy himself, at need.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### DRUIDICAL EDUCATION.

It has been profoundly remarked, that when a man plunges into the abyss of dissipation, it is very difficult for him to check himself. It is possible that Curtius (about whose Christian name, as they very properly call it, many smart and instructed writers are divided, the majority calling him Quintus for a reason of their own) might have had, at the instant he took his celebrated leap, some second thoughts of the kind which passed through the be-muddled brain of our friend Robert Spencer, when he woke, late on the morning after he had made a night of it. But gravitation, patriotic or vicious, will have its way—Curtius went down the hole, and Robert Spencer went on misconducting himself. The day following his demolition of the Bank of England was Sunday; and the evil-minded man agreed with himself that it was of no use going home, there could be no letter from his adored Henrietta; and, moreover, if he were to have recourse to force or stratagem for entering the house from which he had been locked out, evidently the Sabbath-day was not a fit time for such endeavour. And so, it grieves me to relate, he spent that day with very little regard to the proprieties, and that night in a still less commendable fashion.

It would not be edifying to trace his steps, which gradually became more and more unsteady as the Sunday night advanced, or the social circles in which he passed it. Suffice it to say, that the process he underwent in those circles was exactly the reverse of that shadowed out in the magnificent image of Akenside, who suggests the possible progress of the disembodied spirit from star to star,

"Refining, gradual, for her final height,  
And purging off some dross at every sphere."

Night had given way to beautiful dawn, and dawn had prosed down into a dull and gloomy morning, when Spencer, in a state, which I hope will not be very easy for a reader to conceive, and which I have

certainly not the remotest intention of endeavouring to describe, found himself in a broad street near Clerkenwell Green. The street was alive with population, though the shops were unopened, except here and there an early breakfast house ; and Spencer became aware of the fact that he had turned over another leaf in life, and that Monday morning was before him. The premiss was useless to him, for he was incapable of arguing further ; but as he found that if he turned northward he was much pushed and jostled, whereas, if he reversed his way, he was borne easily along by the passengers through the street, whom he fancied were unusually numerous and active, Mr. Spencer took the course that was least troublesome, and was impelled onwards until he reached one of the grand arteries of London life. Here, also, it appeared to the reveller's eye that there were great numbers of people about ; and he felt, as men under vicious excitement will sometimes feel, annoyed with them for being abroad in such preposterous quantities. Here, however, the southward agency deserted him ; and as the folks were all going eastward, he went with them.

The crowd seemed very cheerful, not to say joyous. It was chiefly composed of the humbler classes, in their working clothes, but among them were numerous persons of a higher grade, and a few dressed as gentlemen. There were great numbers of women, but these were all of the inferior class, many of them clean, neatly dressed, and pleasantly excited, as appeared by their smiles and loud laughter. There were, also, other women, of a class not ordinarily visible at that early hour, and of these some were flauntingly arrayed, and had especially smart bonnets, of light colour, and with flowers, which looked gay amid the general sombreness of costume. Some of them were noisy and rampant, and were attended by men not meanly dressed, but of most mean and scoundrelly aspect, and with bloodshot eyes, which looked at you first with effrontery, and then slinkingly. Among the decent women, some had children by their side, and many had babies in their arms, whom they occasionally nourished, and otherwise comforted, chirruping to them the maternal nonsense so much wiser (as Mrs. Browning has acutely observed) than wiser talk. Mixed up in the crowd were girls of all ages, but chiefly varying from ten to fifteen, and these were mostly dirty, slatternly, and impudent, making their eager way onward with that indefinite sort of pawing and pushing, directed against no obstacle in particular, which that class of female adopts to facilitate her progress through a crowd. Boys were also there, some innocent-faced urchins, shaggy and shoeless, others comfortably dressed, and bearing the hard lines of premature vice and cunning. Many of these had short pipes, and not a few had female companions of their own type ; but the younger ones ran in and out, burrowing with their heads in the crowd, and despite occasional cuffs and kicks, getting well on in the moving mass. With it went other lads, with bundles of cheap newspapers, whose names they incessantly screeched, vendors of cakes, lozenges, and oranges, a few soldiers, whose uniforms aided to light up the picture, a few bronzed sailors, in high glee, a good many trim policemen, who glanced with much disfavour at the throng, and occasionally made a dive and a plunge,

which sometimes caught a boy, but more generally proved ineffective, and a number of sturdy farmers, many of them occupying more cubic inches of space than a unit has a right to in this limited world. Society, with the exception of its cream, was fairly represented by the animated and cheerful crowd that struggled along, bearing Robert Spencer with it.

There was no quarrelling, and as much order as was at all compatible with the progress of a great throng determined upon an object. Sometimes members of the mass would be too determined, and their elbowing and driving was either checked by the sturdy arms of the working men on whom they pressed, or by the shrill protests of the women. But there was general good humour, and everybody seemed willing, provided he or she did well for himself, to let others do as well as they might. Gradually the mob grew denser and denser, and it seemed as if several streams of a similar character had met in confluence round a common centre. A few minutes more, and the still bewildered Spencer was safely packed up in a tight throng, whence there was no possible escape, unless, like certain saints of the Christian mythology, he could have been borne aloft by an inspired volition.

An idea then began to interpenetrate the brain of Spencer that all this crowd had not gathered for nothing, and that as a component part of it he might as well ascertain what he was about. But on trying to frame a little inquiry of the neighbours who wedged him in, he found, and was painfully conscious of the fact, that he could not deliver himself, adequately and coherently, of his demand, and therefore he postponed question, and waited to see what was going to happen, in the meantime smiling as he thought kindly upon a child of a year old which had its face over its mother's shoulder, and was cooing as it played with her hair.

Suddenly, the withdrawal of some large object, perhaps a cart, from the neighbourhood, allowed the portion of the crowd that included Robert to press forward a few yards, when it became as dense and rigid as before. But that few yards had done the business, in bringing him past a corner which had shut out the view of the object which had assembled the excited multitude.

Taken for itself, this object might seem scarcely worthy of so much homage. It was not a glittering trophy. It was not a statue to be unveiled. It was not a rostrum for an orator. It was simply a sort of platform, of no great height, erected in front of one of the doors of a large stone building, and from which door a passage of several steps ascended to the platform. The latter was surrounded by a slight chain-work, on rails, lest any one should fall outside it. The description is complete, when we have added that two stout posts supported a cross-beam, from which, and over the centre of the platform, there depended a short iron chain.

Robert Spencer was more than half sobered in a moment, and the sudden sensation which was thus given him, first sickened him, and then created a vehement desire on his part to get away from a scene which he now understood, and at whose loathsomeness his very soul shuddered. His limbs lost their slouch, he stood upright on his

feet, and at once begged to be allowed to get away. His prayer was received with scoff from the men, and by a giggle from the mother of the baby, and he was recommended to make his miserable life happy.

"But I can't bear it. I must go," he cried out.

"Must's for her most gracious majesty the Queen," pleasantly observed the woman, over her shoulder.

"I shall be ill, I shall be mad—I won't stay!" he exclaimed, trying in vain to move. It was impossible, even had his neighbours been inclined to help him. They were jammed inextricably, with the pressure of a couple of thousand men behind them, and ten times that number before and around, for the platform was very attractive.

A decent mechanic, in a flannel jacket and cap (caps are *de rigueur* with the *habitué* upon such occasions, for a reason), seeing that Spencer was evidently in extreme terror and suffering, said, civilly enough,—

"I'd stand still, if I was you, sir. There goes the three-quarters. In eighteen minutes, at furthest, you'll be able to get away."

Indeed, as he spoke, the very sweet and musical chimes of a neighbouring church, dedicated to The Tomb of Him who died on Calvary, sounded out into the air laden with the hot breath of myriads. It wanted a quarter of eight o'clock.

"I cannot bear the sight," said Spencer. "I got into the crowd without knowing why. I shall faint!"

"Shut your eyes, man alive," said another neighbour, roughly but kindly. "That's your only chance, and we'll tell you when to open 'em."

After another despairing appeal, Spencer felt that the course thus advised would in some measure relieve him, and he closed his eyes, though the doing so only seemed to make him feel more keenly the presence of the scene around him. The baby had done the same, and was sleeping very calmly on the shoulder of its mother.

He closed his eyes, and so avoided the sight of the day. Had he kept them open, he would have seen—this.

As the minutes went slowly away, a spectator would every now and then glance up to the clock of the Church of the Tomb. When that clock noted that about three minutes only were wanting to eight o'clock, an electric movement ran through the crowd, and here and there a woman's scream went up. Then, in obedience to a general and peremptory call, all hats went off. You know now why caps are so much better on these occasions. Then there was frightful silence, unlike anything, I hope, that the majority of those who read these lines will ever be able to call to mind. Again a scream or too, and a woman subsides in a dead faint—fall she cannot—and a strong arm in red cloth holds her up; but the soldier's face is fixed on the platform. And now the intense and awful silence is a thing that can be felt, like darkness. It could not be borne long; it is too unnatural for creatures to whom God has given breaths and voices.

The sweet, grave sound of the bell is given out again, and every man and woman in that fearful crowd counts the strokes. The hour of eight is told. One man will never hear the voice of a church-bell again on this earth.

Up the ascending passage slowly move several men, all in black, and they come upon the platform, and take certain appointed stations. One of them holds a book. Amid them is a man whom they have brought with them, and whose legs tremble under him. Perhaps he would cling to one of his companions for support, only his arms, from the elbow upwards, are pinioned to his side; but he can, as you see, clench and open and again clench his hands in the extremity of his terror. His face is very white, but a shorter man advances to him, and turns him with his back to the church of the Tomb, so I cannot (standing on a grave in its churchyard,) tell you how he looks, even with the aid of the double glass I ordinarily take to the opera-house that I may the better see the lady-dancers. But I can see the shorter man kneel on one knee before the pinioned man. Surely not to ask his pardon, as we read in records of the death of noblemen on the scaffold. No, it is to put some stout straps round his legs, and fasten them together. His legs can hardly tremble now, but he might fall forward on his face if an arm were not kindly put round him. It is the arm of the man with the book. Now the short man rises, and places a stout, white, new rope round the pinioned man's neck, and——

I think, speaking for myself, the sensation caused by the fastening that rope is the ghastliest of all. I know that this is a mere material sensation, so to speak, and arises from the incongruity of the act with the appearance of the actors. The stage, and the black clothes, the slow walk, and the gravity, all have something of a solemn decency; but that coarse bit of white cord, and the putting it upon a quiet man's neck, revolt the sense of fitness. At least, so it appeared to me.

The other end of the rope is hooked to the chain on the beam, and all the men in black, save three, have retreated to the passage, leaving the platform to the three. One of these, the short man, produces a large white cap, draws it quickly over the whole head of the pinioned man, and disappears. He is gone below the platform, I know, though I cannot see him; and has got hold of a large handle which can withdraw three bolts at once. But two men remain in presence of the mighty crowd, and one is the man with the book. The man with the handle is listening below, waiting to catch some words which will be read from the book. They are exquisite words, and we have all sobbed to hear them, as, while they were reading, we laid some dear one in the earth. The service for the Burial of the Dead is being read over a live man, who has not one minute to live. I do not know what words that good priest has reached, or what is the signal to the man with the handle, but perhaps the words are——

*"Henceforth, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord——"*

Ha! I can see only half the man with the rope round his neck. The man at the handle has worked it, and the floor of the platform has given way. The pinioned man has dropped through, and is hanging by his neck; his head, in its white cap, thrown back, and on one side. His hands are moving a little, but I am told that in his case it is merely a muscular action. However, to make all sure, the man who held the handle is now hanging by the hanged man's legs. You can see him sway a little. All is over.

They have killed him.

And they have done it very rapidly, adroitly, and humanely, and not at all in the cruel way in which the savage and brutal man, just dead, killed a woman about two months ago, in order to rob her of some money and jewels. And ever since he was sentenced to appear on that platform, the good priest whom you saw, and who is now gone in to breakfast with the other gentlemen (I breakfasted hastily before coming, and intend to do so again, leisurely), has been telling him to make his peace with God, though the now dead man had no such mercy on the woman he slew. He has had full three weeks to repent his sins and become a true Christian; and therefore it is nobody's fault except his own if he has not done so. Anyhow, he deserved to die—and is dead. I am not going into any question about man's right to protect himself, by what he believes the most effective means, against the violence of his fellow-man.

The dead man will hang there for one hour, after which the rope will be cut by the man who worked the handle, and the body will be carried into the prison, and finally buried in a graveyard, over which the now dead man was walking five minutes ago. But we need not, perhaps, wait to see the ceremony of cutting down. Happily for Robert Spencer, who had been keeping his eyes tightly closed, (though the scene was only too faithfully interpreted to him by the sounds around,) many of his neighbours, being industrious mechanics, now wished to go to their work, and he was allowed to get away, now quite sobered.

He hurried from the spot as fast as the crowd would allow him, and paid little heed to those he saw in his way; nor did he buy the account of the way the man died—an account printed two days back, and sold before the drop had fallen. He pushed northwards; but before he was nearly clear of the throng, a voice accosted him.

"Here you are, sir."

It was Zuleika, the little dancing-girl. She had apparently made up her grievances with her so-called uncle, for she was on the shoulder of that individual, who was leaning against a house; and perhaps he had brought her to the execution by way of cementing the peace with a treat. She looked rather pale and scared, but deemed it befitting her to affect to have no unpleasant sensations, and to launch a joke at Mr. Spencer. But the moment he recognised her, he gave her a look of unfeigned disgust, and hastened away.

I do not know what right he had to be disgusted. We have no Druids now; but I have no doubt that if we could search into the annals of the old ones, we should find that they paid every attention to the education of their young folk, our revered ancestry. I have no doubt that when there was a public sacrifice, and the babies were put into the red-hot hands of the brazen idols, fathers and mothers not only came to witness the spectacle, but brought their children, and held them on their stalwart shoulders to see the victims roll off into the fire. A nation that does not educate its children cannot be expected to prosper; and though Robert Spencer did not choose to look at the crowd that day, I did,—and saw that out of the thousands present, thousands were children. And the knowledge that it was

so, gave me great comfort, as it showed me that our glorious old England was still true to some of the maxims and habits of our ancestors.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### ONE GORDIAN KNOT.

"DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this congregation—"

[The congregation was select and distinguished. It consisted of Marinaduke Arundel, Esq., M.P. for Shackleby, and his charming daughters, the Misses Blanche and Geraldine Arundel, bridesmaids. It comprised Mistress Henrietta Spencer, of Gower Street, whose presence could not well be prevented, though her husband had been got rid of in the most artful and considerate manner by Mr. Keckling, who sent him on a special mission to ascertain the respectability of a non-existent country bank. We also observed Miss Bertha Cheriton, bridesmaid, looking fresh, and *espiègle*, and pretty. We noticed Mr. John Claxton, who appeared as the bridegroom's friend. Our attention was next directed to the worthy Mr. Keckling himself, who, in the lamented absence of Mr. Spencer, gave away the bride. In the gallery, much interested in the ceremony, but taking no part in the pageant, were Mr. Latimer Cheriton and four Miss Pybi. Mr. Tarleton, the solicitor, was present, and the allegorical mind might have pictured Law consigning Youth and Beauty to the guardianship of Religion. Finally, near the altar, and looking, if not cheerful, by no means melodramatic, stood Alban Cheriton.]

—"to join together this Man and this Woman in holy matrimony, which is an honourable estate."

And in due course the officiating clergyman, assisted by a reverend friend, arrived at "amazement," and Philip Arundel had a wife, whose name was Margaret, and who had been born Spencer. He had entered into a compact to love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep him only unto her, so long as they both should live.

This arrangement being distinctly understood, the benediction was pronounced, and one Gordian knot was tied.

The three bridesmaids did not cry. Blanche and Geraldine, who were girls of the world, saw nothing to cry about in the fact that their brother was marrying a beautiful girl, and being placed in a comfortable position. Bertha had lived out of the way of such ceremonials, and, being an observant little person, kept her eye on the Arundels, as a sort of fudge-girls who were to set her an example, and not seeing them weep, it did not occur to her to do so. But more than one person of that party confided to another, that during the service there was somebody sobbing in the church. I think Philip Arundel was too excited to hear it—I hope so. John Claxton heard



it, and had his own ideas, which he kept to himself. The eyes of the weeper, be that person who it might, were like the fleece of the son of Joash the Abiezrite; for there were dews there when all around was dry. But I knew not whether the omen was for good, as in the case of Gideon.

Let it be said, however, that this abstinence from pathetic demonstration was not observed by every member of the bridal party. Aunt Henrietta, who had restrained herself with laudable self-command during the ceremony (perhaps held a little in awe by the stately Arundels), deemed it fitting to give subsequent proof of her tender affection for Margaret. Accordingly, when the time came for appending the signatures of the witnesses in the vestry, and Mr. Arundel politely offered the pen to Mrs. Spencer, that lady, after looking at him several times with great intentness, as if her heart were much too full to permit her to utter her feelings, dropped the ink-charged pen upon the book, to the extreme disgust of parson and clerk, and throwing herself back upon a chair, gave a very good imitation of hysterics, which, as there was not the smallest occasion for them, did not excite much sympathy. Alban Cheriton, however, who had watched the performance with a sarcastic expression upon his lip, effected the most miraculously speedy cure.

"So much excitement is dangerous," he said, "in the case of a full habit. I will do what is necessary, and take Mrs. Spencer home."

The words were disagreeable enough, for the wedding breakfast was not at Mrs. Spencer's house, but at Mr. Keckling's, and the worthy woman had no idea of being excluded from the repast. But when, turning towards the young surgeon to deprecate the proposed treatment, she beheld rather a formidable lancet glittering in his hand, she sprang up in dismay, declared herself "quite better," and hastened to snatch up the pen and sign her name in the wrong place. After this, she conducted herself with sufficient decorum and self-restraint until a later period of the day.

It cannot be denied that when Mr. and Mrs. Philip Arundel came out at the church door, they found the road of life very nicely gravelled and rolled smooth for them.

The wedding breakfast went off admirably, and by no means the less so that good Mr. Keckling, who had insisted upon being the host upon the occasion, had exercised his own determined will in the selection of the dishes, and had made the whole affair much like a Greenwich banquet. This singular innovation was largely applauded by the older people, and also by the epicurean, Mr. John Claxton, who discovered that a delicate allusion to the bride's birth-place lay hidden in the *cotelettes de saumon à l'Indostan*, and was gracefully facetious upon the promise of happiness and riches which he declared to be typified by the *gelée eau d'Or*. The younger ones were much too excited and happy to care what was before them, and praised everything indiscriminately. Only poor little Bertha Cheriton, who had never seen such a dainty display, was rural enough to forget to watch the fudge-girls, and to exhibit unfeigned surprise at the elaborate delights with which the Genius of the Banquet can

reward his rich and discriminating worshippers. Jack Claxton was pleased with her, and took some pains to instruct her young mind into the mysteries—made her taste the *sole à la Mazarin*, and the Spey trout *à la Tartare*, and prevented her from astonishing herself by making too hasty an acquaintance with *boudin glacé*.

"Nobody said grace," she remarked to him, *sotto voce*.

"And it was very wrong to forget it," he replied. "As the poet remarks—

" 'An undevout gastronome is mad.' "

"For shame, to spoil such a beautiful line," said Bertha, earnestly.

"I think I have improved it, on the contrary. As for the stars, no doubt they are all very well in their way, though I never saw any particular use in them; but look at this table. There is something to be thankful for. Is it not nobler to be able to make those lovely *rissoles*—no, no, beyond that; those little round things—than to know that Jupiter has got four moons—if it is four, for I am sure I forget? What's the good of Jupiter, tell me now?"

"Why," said Bertha, opening her eyes very wide, "don't you know that he is a thousand times as large as this world?"

"More shame for him to give us no more light. Yes, have some more champagne. You must—it is part of the matrimonial service, and a bridesmaid's duty—see, Miss Arundel takes it. You are looking at those silver things stuck in that sole; well, they are not hair-pins, though they do look like it. I must take some wine with your brother. What an intellectual head he has!"

"We think him very clever, of course, you know."

"Ah! but so do we. I should not presume to judge of his professional ability; but one of our first surgeons told me that a paper your brother has lately read, on—on an extremely difficult subject," said Claxton (remembering to whom he was talking)—"is one of the ablest essays he had ever heard."

"Indeed!" said Bertha, colouring with pleasure. "He never told us. I must write about it to mamma. What is Mr. Arundel standing up for?"

"O, have you never assisted at one of these pretty little comedies before?"

"Do you mean a marriage?"

"I catch in your tone a rebuke for speaking lightly of a subject you think solemn."

"So it is," replied Bertha.

"The bride, your cousin, is not looking very solemn about it."

"Because Mr. Philip Arundel is making her laugh; but I am sure she feels that the occasion is a serious one, poor girl."

Mr. Claxton was really amused at the pretty little Dissenter's sobriety of thought; but every one had now to be grave, as the Senator rose to propose the health of the Man and the Wife. Mr. Arundel had meant to be a little parliamentary, but he had not got very far before he forgot that he was an orator in the thought that he was a father—and he became so unconventional and so earnest in his prayer for the happiness of his son and his daughter-in-law, that when his

kind old voice faltered, and tears of happiness and hope clouded his eyes, the girls began to cry too, and even the young men of the world might have been seen compressing their lips, and only with a struggle preserving the composure which a man of society values so dearly.

"*Si vis me flere*," said Alban to Claxton, as the speech ended. "Mr. Arundel understands that point of art."

"What does Alban mean?" asked Bertha of her instructor.

"A piece of advice given in old days. If you would make your hearers cry, show that you are in earnest by weeping yourself. I don't recommend the same course about laughing, as I hate a man who laughs at his own jokes, or anybody else's."

"I think you would be very angry if people did not laugh at yours," said the little country-girl, delivering a shrewd thrust at the rather self-satisfied London man. Bertha did not know much about *ris de veau piqué à la purée asperge*, and the other works of high art which had been exhibited before her; but she was not a bad judge of character, and could hold her own with most folk.

"I am never angry, and I never joke," said Claxton. "Now for Philip."

The newly-made husband returned thanks very gracefully. For some reason this speech is usually very stupid, and often a breakdown; but Arundel managed not to find his utterances choked by his happiness, and in some well-worded sentences he assured his hearers of his conviction that an inestimable treasure had been confided to him, and of his resolution to show throughout life his appreciation of such a boon. His allusion to his father's kindness, the extent of which he said that only one or two present could know, made the old gentleman put out his hand, and held Philip's affectionately for a minute or two, whereat there were more hydraulic symptoms, but they were suppressed.

Margaret Arundel was looking very lovely and loveable in her bridal array, though paler than was her custom. Only the charming colour returned at no rare intervals to her cheeks, when a kind speech from Mr. Arundel, or an undertoned word or two from her husband, came to her ear. And when Aunt Spencer, who had, through Philip's care, been humanely placed at a considerable distance from the wedded couple, watched her opportunity, and followed up somebody's pleasantry by shouting,

"Ha! mistress bride, hath that affrighted you?"

a richer carnation than came over Margaret's fair face and bust has not often been seen. But she was very happy amid the agitation of the occasion, and felt as one who meant to make another's happiness, and was not altogether distrustful of her power to do it.

The wedding presents had been far more numerous than she could have expected, for her own circle of acquaintances was limited; but that of the Arundels was large; and moreover, Blanche and Geraldine had, when in the country, spoken so enthusiastically about their intended sister-in-law, that, in order to please the girls, who were exceedingly popular, several friends, who knew little of Philip, had written to beg the acceptance of gifts. And Margaret was more fortunate than some brides, for a little thought was bestowed in the selection of

presents, and the donors tried to obtain something which everybody was not likely to give; and so Mrs. Philip did not receive fourteen glass butter-dishes with fourteen silver cows on them. And among the gifts was one from Aunt Spencer, which had, at all events, the merit of good intention, for she had visited a Mount of Piety, with which she had occasional relations when lodgers did not pay, or it was absolutely necessary to raise means; and of the Pious Mountaineer, with the hard face and spectacles, had purchased a dingy-looking old salver, at a tolerably moderate price. This she confided to a small silversmith to rub up and smarten; but it being the nature of such women never to do anything until the last moment, she had delayed this confidence until the eve of the bridal, so that the article had to be sent on to Mr. Keckling's. Here it arrived during the feast, and Aunt Spencer snatched away the paper, and at once presented the gift at the table, perhaps not sorry so to distinguish herself. She begged Margaret to accept it, though made only of the pale and common drudge 'twixt man and man; and Margaret's thanks were being uttered, when Philip said—

"Stay, Mrs. Philip Arundel. That becomes my property now. Thank you, Aunt Henrietta; I am very much obliged to you."

And Margaret looked delighted at the speech, and was rejoiced that she, and all that she had, and all that she ever could have, were Philip's; and that she was to look to him for everything in the world.

"An inscription on it, too," said John Claxton, who had been showing the now shining salver to Bertha. "Let me read it to you."

Some of them expected another bit of Shakspeare; but Claxton, rising, read from the salver—

"Presented to James Snitchey, who commenced waiter at the Spangled Cow Tavern, Moorfields, 11th August, 1807, by a few gents using the house, in testimony of his honesty, civility, and intelligence. 16th June 1822."

There was no standing this; and the whole party, Mrs. Spencer excepted, burst into a merry laugh.

"They have sent home the wrong article, of course," said Philip, good-naturedly, for he had some suspicion of the real state of the case. "You must make them change it, Aunt Henrietta, and we shall find the right one on our return."

But Mrs. Spencer was too much flustered with the exposure to have tact to accept the proffered aid, and she vehemently denounced certain persons unknown to her auditory, as cheats, who deserved that every honest hand should take a whip and lash the rascals naked through the world,—an instalment of which punishment, in the form of a summons, she declared her intention of inflicting that very afternoon. They had known that the inscription was there, and that was why they had kept the thing unsoured, that she might not read it, she said,—gradually revealing the little history of the transaction, to the secret delight of Claxton, who, as has been told, detested her, and rejoiced in her mortification.

"I would not change it, Mrs. Spencer, if I were you," he said. "Get the names and dates beaten out, and insert Philip's name

and the day he commenced husband, as is elegantly stated. Let us hope that he will be honest, civil, and intelligent in that capacity."

No ; Mrs. Spencer was in a rage, and would not laugh, but sat meditating vengeance upon the treacherous Pious Mountaineer, and scarcely listened to the courtly speech in which Mr. Keckling proposed the health of the bridesmaids, with thanks to them, not only for their charming discharge of their duty, but for their goodness in honouring his house with their presence.

"As the youngest bridesmaid, it is etiquette for you to answer this," said Claxton to Bertha. But her look of terror was so genuine that he felt ashamed of himself, as indeed he ought to have been, for practising on an uninitiated person, and he hastened to relieve the poor girl's mind ; and being himself signalled to by the Miss Arundels, who thought it would please Philip to have his friend so complimented, he acquitted himself pretty well. But these clever young fellows seldom do a little bit of the harmless conventionalities of society so well as old gentlemen of the old school. One has heard from folks of the latter class, elegant and telling after-dinner speeches, which have pleased everybody ; when smart men, who knew themselves to be highly superior articles, have gone in for fireworks, and produced no effect at all. Jack Claxton's reply was not half so good as old Mr. Keckling's speech, and Jack felt it, and instantly administered consolation to his soul by saying to himself that it was not the old boy's words, but his house, and his banquet, and his presents, and his position, that made the difference between them ; and that if he, John Claxton, had been the founder of the feast, and the owner of the house, and especially had all that silver hair, he would have had all the women's affectionate looks and enthusiasm. Happy is the man who is like unto the snail, in having always a slime ready for the reconstruction of his shell when smashed into.

Mr. Keckling's own health and that of the father of the bridegroom were, of course, remembered ; and Philip himself, possibly urged by some gentle prompting by his side, begged that similar homage might be done to the kind friends with whom his wife's youth had been passed, and to whom she owed a debt of gratitude she could never forget ; and he hoped that Alban and Bertha would charge themselves with conveying that assurance home. While this was being said, Margaret glanced for a moment at her cousin Alban, and was, or should have been (and women always feel as they should), delighted to see that he was not, apparently, suffering from afflicting memories ; but was waiting with a gracious half smile, until he should have to respond. And this he did with great propriety, adding an expression of his certainty that the amiable and accomplished gentleman to whom his cousin had given her hand was in every way worthy of such a happiness.

These were not exactly the words he had used on the pier at Ryde, but they were clearly better adapted to the occasion than those rather energetic utterances would have been. Margaret listened to his speech with a singular mixture of feeling. If I may say that a shadow of something like a defiant thought crossed the texture of

that feeling, I may add, that I believe it was only the affectionate and loving girl defying her husband not to be—despite predictions—all that she believed him.

And then approached the time for the departure of the linked lovers ; but Margaret found a moment to think of her Aunt Henrietta, by whose discomfiture the bride, unlike Claxton, had been grieved. The poor woman had meant to do a kindness, and had not the means to go to a great silversmith ; but having done her best, had been the victim of an accident. She whispered this to Philip, and asked whether something could not be said for her aunt. He would at that moment have proposed the health of the Titans, and success to their next invasion of Heaven—or an equivalent toast from our own theology—if the beautiful creature beside him had wished such an honour ; and he was instantly on his legs, pronouncing a warm eulogium on the person whom he had not very long before called a hippopotamus and an old idiot, and had hoped would be drowned in her bathing. Ought a man to be held responsible for his actions during the period previous to his emancipation from the superstition that a woman is an angel ?

Mrs. Spencer was much obliged, but had been laughed at, and did not like it ; and her reply was rather sulky, and her mind was perpetually getting away to the whip for the lashing of the undraped pawnbroker through the world. Even Shakspeare played her false this time, and would not supply her with a single quotation,—a privation which the party bore with extreme equanimity.

A little later, and the fair girl whose fortunes we are seeking to trace is finally consigned to the care of him who has sworn to be faithful and true. There should have been some one to say to him, in a young and true poet's words—

“ The Maiden will fulfil your hope,  
Only as you fulfil your Vow.”

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They are gone. If we have lingered somewhat long in their society, and in the company of their friends, it may be forgiven. Two Years of their life will have elapsed before we again meet one member of that wedding party.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A MODEL HUSBAND.

THEY passed—those two years—and at their close not more than the average of change that is in such a period brought to a group of acquaintance had been wrought in the circle in which our story chiefly moves. The Cheritons of St Oscars continued their tranquil life of love, kindness, and duty. The Spencers of London held on in their unsteady and unprofitable career of impulse and casualty.

Alban Cheriton remained in town, although the limited term for which he had originally intended to practise there had expired. He had gained much honourable notice from the heads of his profession for vigour of thought, sagacity, and courage; and as his father's energies were still unabated, Mr. Cheriton willingly abstained from summoning Alban to his aid while that aid was not absolutely necessary, and while the young surgeon was winning a reputation in a wider and nobler field than that of St. Oscars. Alban's manner had become far more popular than when we first knew him; and though his habitual gravity was retained, and, indeed, sat advantageously upon the professional man (patients generally hate a cheerful doctor, for not being sufficiently impressed by the awful and unheard-of nature of their tribulation), he exchanged it, upon occasion, for what appeared to be genuine enjoyment of life, and still more frequently for a not unpleasantly ironical tone, in which the ordinary ear detected no latent bitterness. He was held to be an exceedingly able man, who had not much of the world to learn. One part of this verdict was amply justified; the other may have been based upon mere impression, derived from Alban's self-possession and ready sarcasm.

The Church of England, borrowing an Oriental lyric, apprises the good husband that his wife shall be like the vine upon the walls of his house, and that his children shall be like the olive branches round about his table. Philip Arundel avowed himself perfectly satisfied with an instalmental fulfilment of the promise; and when Margaret made him the father of a boy of even more than the beauty always discoverable in an infant by those interested in its history, he permitted himself, while duly thankful for the blessing, to entertain a hope that his family would not increase in the fashion indicated by the Hebrew benison. And certainly, if he had been prompted to this wish by a conviction that so lovely a mother and so lovely a child could scarcely be again seen in loving juxtaposition, Philip might have been forgiven his Malthusian aspiration. As the pale sweet face of Margaret—looking the paler for her rich dark curls—reposed on the pillow, with the tiny head of her baby peering below, and as her smile, ever gentle, but now speaking a world of new tenderness and affection, rose as by instinct to her lips when Philip approached the couch, the young husband might well be pardoned, amid his thankfulness that his treasure had been spared to him, the hope that it might never again be risked.

Whether this was exactly what he meant, or rather, whether it was all that he meant, one need hardly discuss. He was certainly very fond of Margaret; he had been much agitated as her hour of trial came on, and sincerely exultant when informed that all was well. There was nothing that he would not have done to render her the slightest comfort or pleasure. But it is just possible that he may have thought of himself as well as of his wife. Their honeymoon he had enjoyed beyond expression, and the innumerable little cares and discussions of the subsequent period, while they settled down into their pretty home, had been a source of great pleasure to him, to say nothing of the amusements, hospitalities, and excursions which they had shared, and to all of which the companionship of a graceful and intelligent girl had given a double zest. Later again, and during the time when Margaret was less able to be his companion abroad, his exemplary attention to her had not arisen from a mere sense of duty—he had been really devoted and affectionate; and, later still, as we have said, Philip was all that a husband should have been. Perhaps, however, he could not help regarding the whole arrangement as a kind of bore, and, at all events, as something that he had not desired. There was no disguising from himself the fact that his wife had been, and would be, a good deal withdrawn from his society, and a good deal disqualified from helping him to enjoy himself. And I am not sure that he did not consider it a kind of breach of the matrimonial compact on Margaret's part, when, in answer to a hint of his, to the effect that he should be very glad if she would delegate the nursing her infant, the poor girl looked first startled, and then so grieved, that Philip (who was in great hopes to have found her as docile on this point as on most others) was unable to bear the sight of the pretty face in such trouble, and the bright eyes so much brighter with a sudden film of tears. But though at immense pains to convince her that he had spoken in jest, he could not help feeling himself wronged. The point was never raised again; but Philip was known to have privately demanded of a married friend or two, at how early a date it was the thing to wean a human animal. Calculation upon the information he received did not afford him much delight.

On Margaret's intense happiness over her child, and holy love for it, there is no need to dwell. The girl had dreamed that, in giving up her heart to a lover, her being had changed, and her destiny was fixed for ever. The wife, becoming a mother, learned in no dream, but in all the clearness of womanly perception, and receiving the lesson with all the humility and loyalty of woman's heart, that she had been led into a new world of love and duty; and in the still watches of the night, and in the dim quiet of the chamber, where her infant nestled to her bosom, she prayed for strength to quit herself well. Perhaps, as she made her prayer, the baby stirred beside her heart, and, with a murmured blessing, she pressed her lips upon its warm brow. Perhaps at that moment its father was thinking what a bore it was that Margaret could not have hired a nurse, left the child to her, and come with him for a little yachting, which would have done her all the good in the world. Perhaps he almost doubted



whether he ought not to have insisted upon her taking more care of herself. A baby was all very well, but health and comfort were not to be sacrificed for a sentiment.

All this had happened, and been said, and thought, about a year after the marriage. At the time at which we resume our story, little Marmaduke Arundel, christened, of course, after his grandfather, the senator, was a lovely child of about a year old, and for him Margaret seemed to live, and move, and have her being. It may be as well that those whom medical men call primiparous mothers have not the entire rule of the universe; if they had, vainly might the raging farmer bellow to Jupiter for small rain upon the tender herb. Rain might bring up the crops, but it would prevent the First Baby from riding forth in his perambulator. The merchant might shake his fist at the weathercock, and clamour for an east wind, to bring his rich argosies into the river; but the argosies might dance in the Downs till doomsday—we are not going to give the First Baby bronchitis. Fruit might languish for the ripening sun, and not in vain, but that the fierce rays that ripen fruit peel the skin off the nose and the chin of the First Baby; and as for that blanket of snow so much wanted by the shivering earth—Baby's kind-hearted mamma would give her own best blanket to a beggar, but she will hear of no snow—do you want the streets kept damp for a month, and all sorts of diseases rising from the ground? Yes, it is certainly well that there are no female Joshuas—the celestial machinery would soon be as much out of order as a lady's watch. Philip made this impertinent remark to Margaret one day, on her looking somewhat wistfully at the thermometer; upon which she refuted him by showing him that her own watch, Mr. Keckling's present, was right to a minute, and begged him not to speak lightly of Joshua, as, whether he really made the sun stand still or not, the story had a Christian meaning and application, and, besides, came out of a book which—but here he kissed her, and there was an end of the debate.

It may be important, or at all events interesting, to mention that Margaret's baby, though baptized Marmaduke, was not habitually addressed by that title, but was called "Duke,"—a word which admitted of playful variations about his Grace, and his Royal Highness, and so on. I dare say that his foolish mother, in her heart of hearts, liked this name for its own sake, and thought that her baby ought to be a duke, and was certain that no duchess had such a baby, etc. etc. etc.

One would be exceedingly sorry to grudge Margaret the large joy and happiness which this child brought her. Her pleasure was at once so deep and so ecstatic, that it would seem a cruelty to wish it had been away. But one is bound to say that, great as was her gain by her baby, she was not, in mercantile language, a gainer on the whole transaction. For the kind of thought which made its way into her husband's mind so early in their wedded life—the thought that he was a loser by the arrival of his son, and the more so by Margaret's devotion to that infant—grew and strengthened during the subsequent eight or ten months, and finally became habitual. An heir-apparent naturally goes into opposition to the reigning sovereign,

and the case often occurs in smaller houses than palaces. \*Day by day, week by week, and month by month, Philip made up his mind that the small crowing, cooing thing, which his wife worshipped as an idol, came between her heart and his, and deprived him of his dues of affection and companionship. And the more he indulged this thought, the more it, like any other indulged thing, intruded and took liberties with what it should have reverently let alone.

Nothing, I hope I need hardly say, could be more unjust to the good and affectionate Margaret than any suspicion that she was wilfully preferring her child to her husband, or abating in her duty to the latter. In truth, the idea that she was giving dissatisfaction never entered her head. She found herself entrusted by Providence—blessed would have been the word of her choice—with a little treasure, which demanded her constant and sedulous care, and which brought out, in all their fulness and richness, affections which made her ten times happier than she had ever before been. It never occurred to her that, in giving way to her passionate love for her child, she could be alienating the regard of her husband. Herself utterly unselfish, it never crossed her mind that Philip, to whom she looked up as to a model of manly excellence, could feel aggrieved that she could no longer be his ready attendant when there was pleasure to be sought, or that his conversation, his reading, or his game at chess, could not now be their undisturbed occupation, as in days “before baby came.” At first, she had taken it for granted that Philip would share her pride and transports; and his behaviour during the extreme infancy of the child, when his feelings for her induced him to treat all her ecstasy about the infant with good-nature if not with sympathy, had tended to protract this delusion. Later, when her praises of her idol found very little echo in her husband’s voice—when his paternal kiss was given carelessly—when he evinced, involuntarily, annoyance at the child’s cries, and seemed relieved when it was laid away to sleep, Margaret was puzzled; but the goodness of her heart prevented her from being hurt, and she made up her mind that men’s way of loving children was different from that of women. Still it seemed strange to the happy Margaret, when indulging in some of the million endearments between mother and child, or perhaps venturously trying whether baby could stand for a moment (and watching the grand experiment with an anxiety which Stephenson never felt when the Rocket gave its first snort), that her appeal to papa to put down his newspaper and behold the great sight arose half unheeded, and brought perhaps only a monosyllable, perhaps a careless glance, or perhaps still less notice was vouchsafed. Margaret could not make it out, and, half reproachfully, would sometimes press the child’s soft face to its father’s, and little knew that he endured the caress much more for the sake of saving her annoyance than from any admiration of the violet-scented creature thus forced upon his parental notice.

Gradually, but certainly, Duke turned his father a good deal out of the house. In the times of their early wedlock it was very rarely that Margaret and Philip spent an evening apart, and his attentions increased up to the time of Duke’s arrival. Then, of course, came



*Inattention!*

London, Richard Bentley, 1858.



the period when a husband and a father must find his own amusements, if he requires any; and Philip Arundel naturally made his way back to a Club or two, and other gatherings, at which the man whose home is on the other side of a black door in an Inn of Court, or in solitary lodgings, may be easily forgiven for assisting, but where the man with a house and a wife should have a particularly good excuse for being found at midnight. And having found that it was amuse himself in this way, he carried on the habit after the excuse quite possible to had ceased.

"I think, Margaret dear, that I shall dine at the Club to-night. My coming home induces you to sit up longer than you ought to do, and that is not well. For a little time we must be careful of you."

This—or this sort of thing—said in a caressing manner, and in a tone of grave concern, of course answered its purpose with the affectionate wife, and she could not plead that Philip's coming home and entertaining her with cheerful conversation would do her more good than an additional hour or so of rest. She did urge one day, however, that when he did not come home he missed seeing baby before it went finally to sleep; but this argument had not the weight it deserved, and Philip, indeed, sometimes went out in the morning without ever seeing Duke at all, a negligence which Margaret thought, the first time it happened, would make papa so uncomfortable that he would come home in the middle of the day. But no such repentance happened, and the mother began to comprehend that, by some accident or other, men must have been created who did not care about babies.

There was a christening, however, and Philip behaved as well upon this occasion as he did at his marriage; and his speech after dinner, in return for the health of his wife and himself, was almost touching. Margaret, in fact, sobbed outright, which she had never done at her wedding, when Philip quoted something from Coleridge about his hope that one of these days his child might "wander like a breeze" beside the sea, and be as happy there as his parents had been a couple of years ago. The senator, who was one of the godfathers, and Mr. Keckling, who was the other, were also delighted, as, it is needless to say, was Geraldine Arundel, who had "drawn lots," she said (Philip more than hinted that the girls had tossed up a sixpence), with Blanche as to which should be godmother. Margaret long looked back to this christening day.

But Philip had broken the home-spell, so far as he was concerned, and it was not impossible that he might, ere long, break the wife-spell too. At present there was no reason for this. Margaret was to him what she had ever been from the hour she consented to become his—gentle, affectionate, docile, seeking only how she could render herself more and more acceptable to him. She knew that she had received an education which, though good, was a provincial one, and that he was naturally fastidious; and she studied to correct anything, if there were anything, in language, tone, or thought, that could annoy her husband. She took his estimate of everybody as her own, and without a pang resigned several opinions, which she had learned under the

roof of her liberal and dissenting uncle, in favour of the more aristocratic Arundelian politics. There were only two subjects on which she could never be shaken. One of these was religion. This, with Margaret, was no mere sentiment, inspired by a fine organ, and an impressive preacher, and the stained-glass of a handsome church, and about as valuable and as likely to exercise influence on one's life as the sensation one derives from the last scene of "Robert the Devil." It was a religion whose seat was in the heart, and not in the senses. She was no bigot. Brought up a dissenter, she had unhesitatingly become a member of the Church of England, in conformity with the desire of her husband—if so grave a term should be applied to his observing, on the first Sunday they spent together, that he supposed they might as well go to church as not; but since that time she had been regular in her attendance there, when health permitted. And if ever a shade of displeasure came over her face, it was when Philip, who fancied himself a bit of a philosopher, came out with a little morsel of Voltairean flippancy, or Straussian neology, and tried to shake her reverence for things that she had been taught to hold sacred. This style of attack annoyed her the more from its being new to her. She had lived with those who would as soon have thought of arguing about the truth of revelation, as a man would think of arguing about the honour of his mother. And when Philip hinted to her that it was all very well to let charity-children believe certain things in a bald, vulgar way, but that there was another way in which thinking persons could, without rejecting the received stories, bring them into accord with philosophical views; Margaret was shocked, and wanted to know whether the poor charity-children had no souls. Philip had caught up a good many of the small arguments with which clever men, especially men who smoke meerschaums, are in the habit of entirely smashing Christianity; but arguments that are quite strong enough for a party of men over wine, and between *double entendre*, will not always serve with an earnest-minded woman, who is not ashamed to believe that her reason may not be strong enough to teach her everything in this world and the next. So with Margaret Arundel. Her other faith, as has been intimated, was in her baby. Save on these two points (and really it is not quite the worst thing that can be said of a woman, that she loves her God and her child), there was nothing in which Margaret was not the implicitly submissive wife that chiefly falls to the lot of a husband who does not know how to value the gift.

It is an ugly word, but it must come out—Philip began to neglect his wife. Not coarsely, nor exactly in an unkind manner, and assuredly not with any intention of hurting her feelings. He was perfectly aware how good she was, and when with her he retained more of his own old fondness than, when absent, he imagined that he felt. He was glad, too, when he heard from her some cheerful little story about the way in which her evening had been agreeably helped out in his absence. That is to say, that Philip was a good-natured gentleman. But the good-natured gentleman contrived to be away from home a good deal, and that at hours when it is not the custom of solicitors to come rushing down the steps of the Temple

cellars with briefs, and when Philip was certainly not in his particular cellar reading the briefs which had been delivered. It was the old story. There was no particular harm in what he did. He dined with his equals at a respectable place; and if he drank too much wine, it was not a great deal too much—certainly not enough to make him forget anything, except that he ought to go home. No harm afterwards, so far as one can see. If he went to the theatre, in most cases the deed carried its own punishment, as he usually suffered from a bad performance, and always from a bad ventilation. I do not think he played much—a little whist, with men he knew, was no great gambling—and Philip understood something about the game, and once bought his wife a toilet-bottle with part of his winnings. His supper was usually a light one, and oysters are exceedingly digestible fish; and as for drinking,—why, if you will eat, you must drink something; and in regard to tobacco, most men want either a sedative or a stimulant, and tobacco has the ambidextrous advantage of being both. And then, when he was enjoying himself in any of these ways, and the thought that he was a married man came across him (when his eye fell on his hand he could hardly help being reminded of the fact, by a ring his wife had given him), he immediately choked it off:

“If Margaret were not tied to the house by that child, I should be taking her somewhere, instead of being here; so it is not my fault that I am here and she is at home. Box-keeper!”

The proper lunch for a Templar is a hard biscuit, and a glass of water from one of the excellent pumps of the vicinity. But if the same Grand Master who, in the time of Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert and Ivanhoe, worked so sudden and signal a regeneration in the habits of the order, were to take a midday stroll round Paper Buildings, and other aristocratic portions of his domain, he would find that the luxury he so sternly condemned had made its way into the deep solitudes and awful cells of the Temple. Some men have napkined refectories from adjacent hostelries; others seek the hostelries themselves; while a third, and still more Sybaritic class, wander westward in search of refreshment at their Clubs.

One afternoon, Philip Arundel, who belonged to the third class just mentioned, was on his westward march, when Alban Cheriton overtook him. The young men did not meet very frequently, but they were on friendly terms; and Alban, though he did not often intrude himself upon the St. John's Wood *ménage*, was an occasional visitor there, and was always received with kindness by his cousin Margaret. Some advice which he had given in the case of a little illness of Duke's had, moreover, afforded him no slight hold upon Mrs. Arundel's gratitude.

Alban mentioned that he was on his way to one of the West-end hospitals, to witness a new and important operation which was to be performed by the great Sir Scalpel Slasher.

“Something awful for the poor patient, I suppose,” said Philip.

“Well, yes,” said Alban, “it will be severe; but it will be performed under chloroform.”

“Could you take in an outsider? I have an immense interest in

that kind of thing. But don't think of it, of course, if I should be *de trop*."

"Are your nerves steady?" said Alban. "Sir Scalpel was awfully abusive one day because a young dresser fainted away in the middle of some operation. He told the young fellow that he was a disgrace to a liberal profession."

"I'll not faint," said Philip, "that I'll promise you. I should not like to hear a man screaming, and that the chloroform will prevent. If you can take me, I shall be much obliged."

"So be it," said Alban; and they went.

When they reached the hospital, they found that the operation was postponed for half an hour, to suit some engagement of the great surgeon's; so they went down-stairs into a comfortable room below the basement, in which they found a knot of medical students eating cold meat-pie, and otherwise fortifying their nerves and clearing their minds for the approaching lesson. Mr. Cheriton, who was held in much admiration even by a class not in the habit of being much impressed, or of signifying their esteem with any servility of ceremony, was made very welcome by the seniors of the party, and by the house-surgeons; and perhaps Philip felt, as he listened to the professional conversation with which the pie was flavoured, and noted that the questions put to Alban were real and searching, and that his answers were as real and conscientious, that fluency and *savoir faire* are hollow things, after all, when compared to the results of sound and earnest study. Perhaps he felt a little envious of any man who could come, without preparation, into a circle like that, and fearlessly bring up theory and experience to be raked and sifted, by men with cool heads and keen perceptions. Humbug had small chance there.

"It's a real engagement of Slasher's, I suppose," said one of the men, "that makes him keep us waiting."

"Lord, yes," said another; "*he* never did the cellar dodge."

"What's that?" asked two or three voices.

"Why," returned the first speaker, "it's a sort of general name for any plan for making people think you are in enormous request."

"*Unde derivatur?*" asked Philip.

"Latin, I believe," replied the other; "in which case I respectfully drink to your health in this beer. I heard the word first used about a doctor who was in the habit of asking folks to dinner, and not making his own appearance for an hour after they had all come, and when they were raging, and who used then to hurry in with all sorts of apologies, and say that he had been detained by some duchess, or countess, or at the Palace."

"That's common enough; but what about the cellar?" persisted another.

"Well, one day he tried this trick; and after his guests had waited an hour or so, one of them declared he would order dinner, and the instant he had rang, in popped the host, who must have been hiding in the cellar, for they had watched the front door and the bedroom stairs."

"A stupid kind of story," observed a grateful auditor.



"Who said it wasn't?" calmly replied the narrator. "And why shouldn't I tell a stupid story if I like? We live in a free country, I am given to understand."

Presently it was proposed that they should adjourn to the place of operation. This was a very small theatre, with a strong and awful-looking table in the centre, around which the seats arose very precipitously. It was lighted from above. It had in its time been perhaps a more fearful torture-chamber than any in the Inquisition; but since the discovery of the merciful agent which has almost turned the surgical table into a bed of roses, the chamber has seldom echoed to the agonized shriek of the sufferer. Philip Arundel being among the earliest arrivals, was placed very near the scene of action, and he looked round with some dismay to see that the other intending spectators hemmed him in so closely that there was no escape for him, let his sensations be what they might.

It was speedily announced that Sir Scalpel Slasher's carriage was at the door, and orders were given to bring down the patient. In a few moments a pallid-looking being, with a blanket thrown over him, and his eyes blindfolded, was borne carefully in, and placed upon the table. While the spectators were watching him, a slightly-built man, in black, with his coat buttoned close up to his chin, entered from a side-door, and gave a keen glance at the patient. Cold blue eyes, an aquiline nose, compressed lips, and a decided manner, afforded at first an impression that a stern man stood before you; but a second look showed you that there was benevolence in the face, and some quietly-given directions for the greater comfort of the patient confirmed the conviction.

Alban, looking at the new arrival, touched Philip, that he might notice the great surgeon. But Philip's nerves began to remind him of their existence; and the touch seemed to grate upon him. He heartily wished that he had not asked to be brought there; and when something glittered in the hand of the operator, and Philip perceived that he was looking, as a French duellist looks at his sword, upon the edge of a most malignant-seeming knife, Arundel's sensation was less enviable than that of the pale creature on the table, who knew nothing of the steel that was so near him.

A nod from Sir Scalpel, and the stupifying process began. In what seemed to Philip a very short time, one of the surgeons at the patient's head gently forced open an eye of the latter, who had sunk into repose, and was far away in his native county, carousing with old schoolmates, and roughly courting the Phyllis of his youth. The nod was returned by this gentleman; and Sir Scalpel, knife in hand, advanced to the table—

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"You bore it very well," said Alban, as he conducted Philip from the theatre, as soon as the mutilated patient had been carried away. "I thought at one time you would have broken your word, and gone down. We'll get you some brandy."

"If you would," gasped Arundel. "My head seems to be coming open."

It was thought, in after-days, that the shock which that night struck Margaret to the heart might have been prepared for her by the deliberate design of one who had his own ends to serve. It was thought that when, late in the evening, Alban Cheriton brought to the gate of the house in St. John's-wood a companion so foolishly tipsy, that at one moment he poured out wild nonsense, and the next was almost in tears, and who had so lost command of himself that he could hardly stagger up the short walk from the gate, he had not unwillingly afforded Margaret, who had rejected him, this specimen of the conduct of him who had been preferred. It was even thought that Philip had fallen into a trap laid for him by the designing Cheriton. We are seldom judged rightly in this world; and, moreover, I will not say that passages in Alban's subsequent life did not give excuse for general suspicion of all his relations with Philip Arundel. But save that he did not, upon this occasion, dissuade the latter from returning home until sobered, as Cheriton might easily have done, there was, I believe, no reason to accuse him of any premeditation in presenting to Margaret, for the first time, the spectacle of a helplessly drunken husband.

Had Alban nurtured such a plan, he would have repented it, could he have seen it in action—seen the young wife witnessing the folly of the intoxicated Arundel, and terrified alike to approach or to withdraw from him. Utterly bewildered by his allusions to the scene he had witnessed (and which had really been the cause of his yielding to the influence of far less wine than he could ordinarily take with impunity), and shamed by his absurdities of speech and gesture, poor Margaret gazed in speechless grief upon a sight happily new to her; and it was not until the painful interview was broken in upon by a domestic whom Arundel's condition did not much affect, but who was indignant that her delicate young lady should be detained to witness it, that Philip was beguiled to his own apartment, and Margaret left to her tears and her prayers. That was the first night of misery she had passed since making Arundel's acquaintance.

I wish it had pleased Alban to spare it her, instead of to say, as he drove back to town—

"Why should I have kept him at my place? She found him so perfect—how do I know but she may like that sort of thing?"

Not even deceiving himself by such words, and there was nobody else to deceive.

However, though he would not save Margaret that miserable night, he saw fit to go up to St. John's-wood in the morning, to ascertain how matters stood. He learned that Margaret was in her bedroom, and that Mr. Arundel had gone out very early in the morning, "before she was awake,"—not, poor thing, that she had slept, and he must have trodden stealthily for her to miss his footfall. So Alban sat down at Margaret's neat little writing-table, and left Philip a note, in which friendly inquiries after his health were followed by a regret that Arundel had so pertinaciously rejected Alban's solicitations to remain at his lodgings. He added an obscure hint that he had arranged

something which might have led to unpleasantness, and that Philip must take care to say nothing about it. This note he sealed, but, purposely, with such apparent carelessness that the least handling would cause it to open, and then he left it for Mr. Arundel. If Mrs. Arundel chose to read it, that was not Mr. Cheriton's fault. If she did, the contents, and the careful inquiries which he made of the servant about her master, whom Alban took care to mention that he had seen home on the preceding night, were calculated to do Philip no particular good, and Alban no particular harm.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

## CONDONATION.

THE husband had left home stealthily, in order to avoid meeting his wife until some sort of explanation had been made by him—some apology offered for the outrage to her feelings. The sentiment that prompted this departure was a gentlemanly one; but a husband who loved more sincerely would hardly have waited for this tardy and devious mode of reconciliation, and would have found, too, a surer way to attain his object. Margaret had been shocked and stunned by the unwonted sight which had been presented to her; but a pang of another kind shot through her loving heart when she found that Arundel had hesitated to come to her when restored to himself—to throw himself into her arms, and to receive absolution.

But Philip was better treated than he deserved, as sometimes happens to us all; and it is, no doubt, that we may not tempt ourselves to habitual acts of unworthiness that we so pertinaciously omit to register and remember these instances of good fortune. He had hastened to his chambers, and had set himself to write a letter to his wife, explaining the way in which he had been led so far to forget himself. But morning composition is impeded by the effects of over-hilarity overnight; and in proportion to the rapidity with which one has then talked, is the slowness with which one now writes. Philip was still on the first page of his narrative when a lady's unmistakeable knock was heard, and in another half minute Margaret had kissed him; and, glancing at the letter, which began with her name, quietly put it into the fire, and kissed him again.

She did not want to hear anything more on the subject; she had brought Alban's letter with the seal broken—that could not be avoided—but she had not read a word; and she came to remind him of a promise to take her up the river. It was just the autumn day for the purpose; they were in time for an early train to Maidenhead; the Cliefden woods would be beautiful; he should row her in a little boat; they could dine quietly at Mr. Skindell's.

"And the baby?" asked Philip.

Margaret coloured; she was in doubt whether he would be pleased

with her ; but—but nurse and baby were in a cab at the corner—would he mind——

He would have been a more ungrateful wretch than I hope he was, if he had minded anything that day. It was exactly what he could have wished ; there was no business particularly requiring his attention that day ; the weather was lovely ; it would do her good, him good, Duke good ; and if she had only—but it didn't matter in the least, and wasn't worth a word—but if she *had* happened to think of Fizz and a fishing-rod——

And both were in the cab at the corner, the faithful dog keeping jealous guard over his master's infant ; and the tackle, though selected by Margaret in a great hurry, and under unfavourable circumstances, was by no means the bundle of incongruities which might have been expected. Philip cheerily declared that with a little addition, easily procured, it would be exactly the thing ; and away they went for the day.

Evidently it would be encouraging a husband to persist in habits of intoxication for a wife to make up matters in such a way ; and therefore, madam, it is needless to say that the much better plan, when a spouse returns home "over-nourished," is to begin at once with ridicule or scolding, or both, and to serve the same refrigerators up at breakfast, finishing off with a caution, as he goes out, not to do the same thing two nights running ; not that it is anything to you, of course—he has long since ceased to take any interest in your feelings, or to care what you wish—but because everybody has remarked that his constitution is not what it was, and such freaks, which might be all very well in a young, strong man, will accelerate a break-up, for which he knows best—you know nothing of his affairs, of course—how should you ?—whether he is prepared, as a man with a family that he pretends to care about, ought to be. A gentleman who has undergone this form of treatment is very likely to abstain from an excess, or, at all events, to abstain from coming home after one. Margaret was but a young matron, and may be pardoned her error.

Talking to his wife about his offence while nurse was present, was of course impossible, but a good general conversation was maintained *vid* the baby, whose feats of intelligence and miracles of virtue supplied Margaret with ample theme for discussion, at which she worked so perseveringly, that Arundel began to be deluded into the belief that, after all, there might be something in his child superior to the average characteristics of babies. Some masculine parents sincerely entertain this creed, though affecting to disavow it ; but they are not generally men of Philip Arundel's type, but undersized parties, with legs more or less out of the line of beauty, but who nevertheless strap down their trousers, wear high hats, and dress more smartly on Sundays than at other times. And why are they to be laughed at for holding, touching their offspring, the faith that you, Dr. Cribb, have about your sermons—you, Lieutenant-Colonel Cascable, R.A., about your bombshells—you, Mr. Fleck, about your pictures—and you, Mr. Fitzserial, about your novels ?

But when Maidenhead was reached, and Duke and his attendant left there until their proprietors' return, and Margaret and her hus-

band were floating past the beautiful woods, now coloured to a hundred different tints by the autumn sun, Philip made an attempt to extenuate his conduct.

"My darling," said Margaret, putting her hand into his, "please don't say a word about it. It is very unkind of you to think that I do not know quite well that it was all accidental; and if I had not been sitting up, which I had no business to do, I should have known nothing about it. Now it will be very cross of you to say any more, —wont it, Fizz? You must bite your master if he is cross to me."

"You are the best girl in the world," said Philip.

"I know I am," said Margaret, smiling; "and Duke is the best boy in the world, though you have never told him so from the hour he came. Did you ever see anything more heavenly than his eyes, sir?"

Of course you know what Philip answered, and there was a good deal more of the same kind of thing. The condonation was complete; and as for Alban's letter, it was torn up and made into little boats, and set floating at Cookham.

But thenceforth, when Philip returned home at all late, Margaret, despite herself, would watch nervously lest there should be any symptom of his having indulged in wine, and perhaps would sometimes imagine that she detected such evidence when really there was nothing of the kind. It would be going too far to say that her confidence in her husband was shaken, but she experienced a certain uneasiness as to his power of resisting temptation.

"I heard of you the other night," said our friend John Claxton to Philip, as they met a few days later.

"You heard something to my credit and renown, I hope," returned Arundel.

"I don't know about that."

"Living in a demoralized atmosphere, my dear Jack, you are incapable of discerning the true beauty of goodness. Marry a wife, and comport yourself seemingly."

"If I had married a wife, I don't think I should go home to her in a state of mops and brooms, after offering to fight a fishmonger in the Haymarket because he had arranged his lobsters and prawns in a way displeasing to my bewildered eye."

Philip coloured with vexation.

"Was I such an ass?" he said. "It's very likely. Who told you, John?"

"A medical animal."

"Not Alban Cheriton?"

"Do you think *he* knows that there are such things as fishmongers and tipsy swells? Do you imagine that he would concern himself with your follies?"

"By Jove, Jack, he led me into the only real scrape I've been in since my marriage. I don't mean to say that it was his fault; but he took me to an operation, which so upset me that, as far as I know, very little wine took hold of me, and it was a Case."

"Cheriton did, eh?" said Mr. Claxton. "I did not know that he patronized you."

"Nor I," said Arundel, haughtily.

"Humbly imploring pardon if offending—which not being meant should not be taken," said John Claxton, in a sarcastic tone, "I would imply that Mrs. Arundel's cousin is a gentleman whom, one of these days, it will be something to know. He's well in the saddle, my boy, and means to ride the race."

"And win it, I hope," said Philip; "for he is a very good fellow, though a little stiff and silent. He'll be better when he has seen more of the world."

"The calm assurance of some folks is commendable," said Claxton. "And you propose to show the world to this man, who has more brains in his finger than—now then, look red again—than I have in my whole body—and you begin the exhibition at the Haymarket?"

"I have no more recollection, Jack, of having been there than of being in the moon. Indeed, I can't think what I did with my afternoon. We went to the hospital early, and it was night when I got home."

"And pretty late into the night, too. Do you keep your servants up until such hours?"

"I have my latch-key," said Philip, hastily.

"And your watch-key; but you could use neither of them that night, Philippus. Answer like a man whether your watch was going next morning."

"Yes, it was," said Philip. Which was true; but a white hand, that trembled too much to make the operation an easy one, had wound up the watch.

"Well, you are no longer my pupil," said Claxton, "and so I have nothing to say; but if I had, I should strongly recommend you not to relapse into our ungodly bachelor fashions. You have the best excuse in the world for cutting anybody and everybody that would keep you from home; and if I had a wife like yours——"

"Confound your preaching; didn't you do everything to dissuade me from marrying, you humbugging old epicure that you are?"

"That is in no sort, manner, or degree the question," replied Claxton, coolly. "That I thought you best calculated to grace bachelorship is no reason why I should desire to see you disgrace matrimony. What business have you at Clubs?"

"One must hear what is going on, I suppose."

"There is a journal called the *Times*, which you may read for an hour every morning for a small amount in copper, and which will tell you accurately what is going on, many hours before the Club can repeat it to you inaccurately."

"What's the good of talking stuff?—one don't go to the Club for what one can read in the *Times*."

"No; you go to the Club to hear what men are going to the bad, and why; and whether they were hit hard at Epsom or at Ascot; and to remark that you always thought they were rather going it. And you want to hear which of the *corps de ballet* it is that is this year making a greater fool of Sir Pilkington Winks than Providence left him, and who was her last victim, and who wants to be her next. And you desire to meet Jowley, because he is junior in Mrs. Labington's

divorce case, and will tell you a lot of things that came out in evidence, but which it wouldn't do to print in the papers. And, further, you go because there has been a savage quarrel between Saker and Blosset, who are both members, and were such sworn friends, and you want to know the particulars ; and whether that is true about Blosset and Miss Montefiasco, the black-eyed Hebrew vocalist. And you covet to hear the last spiteful thing that has been invented about poor Egerton, who is the most harmless bore in the world. And you want to make a bet whether Lord Fitzrupert's horse will run for the Two Thousand while his master is a minister, and on the horse's winning, and on the double event. And you want to say a few things about some of the candidates who are up for election at the club, in the hope of getting one or two black-balled. And you want to get Tyssen Dalston to ask you to diuner, now that he has come into his uncle's wine, and so you will lead the talk up to comet hock; and say there is none in England. And you want to get some letters that you don't choose should come to your chambers, far less to your house. These are the noble objects of your going to the club, I admit, and not to hear what is in the *Times*."

"A devilish long speech, Jack—after which you might give us a weed."

"Come over the way, and I will. But isn't all I say quite true? And what's the good of all that *bosh* to you, with a wife at home, and society to go into? You don't tell your wife about Miss Montefiasco and the rest of it?"

"Well, not exactly."

"And you don't talk about such things when you have dinner-parties?"

"Hang it, Pinnock's Catechism, hold your nonsense. We shall see you married one of these days, and then we shall also see whether you are so ready to give up all your amusements."

"My hypothetical weakness is no excuse for your incontrovertible folly, my boy ; and now, as I have said enough——"

"At least."

"It is all for your good, you know. Come over and have a smoke."

"That you consider a proper thing to do in the daytime. I am glad of that, anyhow."

"Reserve your gladness for fitter occasion. I hold the practice to be exceedingly improper in the daytime ; but then I like it, and am too much an enemy of all despotisms to permit my good sense to tyrannize over my passions."

And so they returned to the old chambers to which long ago the reader has been introduced ; and Philip Arundel, well satisfied, as he had every right to feel, with his married condition, owned to a certain odd sensation as he sat himself down to offer a burnt sacrifice in that Temple of Liberty.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## A VERY BLACK CLOUD.

MARMADUKE ARUNDEL, member for Shacklebury, was sitting in his library in the house in Thanington-square, considering a political question which was about to be discussed in Parliament (and, no doubt, deciding upon his own course with reference to the merits of the subject, and not with any thought of his party's claims or his constituents' prejudices), when he was informed that a gentleman, whose card bore the name of Mr. Armand, wished to see him.

"I don't know him," said Mr. Arundel. "Have you seen him before, Thompson?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir. He looks rather like a clergyman, sir, I'm thinking."

"Humph. Some beggar, I suppose—sheepfold not large enough for the dear lambs—shepherd wants a guinea. Send him in," he added, despairingly.

Servants' descriptions of your visitors are, however, so invariably ridiculous, that a reader will not be surprised to hear that the only clerical association connected with the dress of the stranger now ushered in to Mr. Arundel, was, that his clothes were black. But they were well made, and somewhat military in their neat and trim cut; and the visitor wore smart high-heeled boots, of patent-leather. The hat had what is called shape about it, but the shape was not that affected by shepherds in holy orders. The visitor's age might be about that of Mr. Arundel himself, but he looked younger, and was compacter and more decided in his movements than the representative of Shackleby, who had taken very mildly the disease called life.

"I am an entire stranger to you, Mr. Arundel, and I have no favour to ask," said the visitor, smiling. "The knowledge of that second fact may be satisfactory, as it is a slow torture to know that a story is working gradually round in the direction of your cheque-book."

"Is the visit with which you honour me connected with the interests of my excellent constituents?" asked the senator.

"Very remotely, if at all; but they are to be congratulated on their being so immediately in the mind of their member."

Mr. Arundel bowed, and waited further information.

"You are, Mr. Arundel, happy in the possession of a son—a young gentleman of whom every one speaks with regard."

"I am glad, sir, to hear that any merit he may have is so largely recognised."

"He was married, with your approbation, some two years ago, or rather more, to a young lady every way worthy of him?"

"He was, sir."

"And they live in St. John's-wood, in happiness and prosperity?"

"The address is in the Blue-book, sir," said Mr. Arundel, who naturally began to be puzzled with this *resumé* of family history.



"Thanks ; but I have seen your daughter-in-law at her house, and your son at his chambers. Their infant, your grandson, a very charming production, has some resemblance to yourself—as much as the undefined features of a child can have to the lineaments of a thoughtful man in years."

"The interest you take in them——"

"Needs explanation. You shall have it. But, in the first place, I should like to ask you whether you know anything of the family of Mrs. Philip Arundel?"

"I should have imagined, sir, from your appearance and manner, that you were acquainted with the world ; and would conclude, from the fact of the marriage, that all necessary information had been afforded," said Mr. Arundel, dryly.

"A most proper answer," said the other. "The public service suffers from Mr. Arundel's not choosing to occupy a position in which he could give such answers from the Treasury bench."

Mr. Arundel remained silent.

"Now, sir," said the visitor, after a short pause, "I will make my business exceedingly clear. You will to-morrow entertain at your hospitable board a select party of friends, among whom will be included your son and your daughter-in-law."

"It is no secret, sir, however you may have heard of it."

"It is no secret, sir, as you justly remark. Any one favoured with an invitation to Mr. Arundel's table is, and properly, too proud of the distinction to be silent upon the subject. My object is to suggest a single addition to your party."

"You are exceedingly obliging."

"Which means damnably impertinent. A happy language is ours—so agreeably reversible. I am in hopes, however, that my suggestion will meet your approval. I propose to you to forward to Mrs. Philip Arundel, with a request that she will convey it to the right quarter, an invitation for to-morrow, Tuesday, at eight, to her father, who has just arrived in England. Ask him to waive ceremony, and accompany the young couple. I have reason to believe that he will comply."

"Mr. Armand," said Mr. Arundel, taking up the card, and reading the name from it. The visitor interrupted him.

"Mr Armand is——"

"My present visitor, sir ; and, as a man of the world, that gentleman will know where a conversation should stop. Stopped at its present point, no annoyance can be caused to any reasonable person. I beg to make this remark—namely, that the circle of my acquaintance is already as large as I desire it to be, and therefore my increasing it is out of the question."

He rose, and put his hand to the bell.

"A word more, sir, before you ring. Your answer is, as you observe, one with which it is impossible to quarrel. I, of course, have but to accept it and withdraw. But inasmuch as I should grieve not to show equivalent courtesy, I deem it right to say that the course you take, no doubt from well-considered reasons, will not tend to the restriction of your circle of acquaintance, but the reverse."

Mr. Arundel made no answer, but again approached the bell.

"In this way, sir. Your dinner on Tuesday will be given only to those whom you have invited ; but your next will include both Mrs. Philip Arundel's father—and her mother."

"There is no such person," said Arundel.

"I have such very good reasons for knowing the contrary——"

"I have no wish whatever to hear them, or to prolong this interview," said Mr. Arundel, ringing. Thompson was prompt at the door, having a theory that mendicant clergymen were not particular as to what offerings they collected, or whether the levy were legal, and the master of the house was master of the situation. The stranger bowed himself out with much propriety.

"About what I expected," he said to himself, as he paced the square; "and as we both kept our tempers so well, there is no harm done. Curse the woman for making the old gentleman tell a lie."

What this last amiable sentiment meant may be discovered hereafter.

The dinner to which the stranger had referred, took place, and among the guests were Philip and his wife, the latter looking the most charming of young matrons. Mr. Arundel had designed to say a word either to Philip or to Margaret upon the subject of the interview he had had, and on which he had been bestowing some uneasy thoughts. It need scarcely be said that he had no doubt as to who his visitor had been, or that information which he had, since the marriage, received from the vigilant Mr. Keckling, had determined him on the course he should take in the event of Armandale Spencer's ever seeking his acquaintance. But of Mrs. Spencer, Keckling had said nothing ; and although Mr. Arundel had no reason to believe the assertion of the stranger, and saw in it only an intended annoyance, he was too much concerned for the happiness of his children not to wish them on their guard. He therefore meant to caution Philip and Margaret as to the line of conduct they should adopt if Armandale Spencer forced his presence upon them. But the eternal baby, Duke, was again in the way. Margaret, who had been thinking about little else during dinner, begged Philip, so piteously, to take her away before the gentlemen came upstairs, that there was nothing else to be done ; and it was to Philip's credit that, though the drive from Thanington-square to St. John's-wood is a long one, he did not make a single disagreeable remark in reply to Margaret's pretty apologies and pleas. It would have been difficult, to be sure, to say anything unpleasant to such a face as that when it rested lovingly on one's shoulder ; but, if she had been a plain woman, I think that, perhaps,——but then, to be sure, she would never have been Philip Arundel's wife. All I mean is, that it is best for a woman to be good-looking when a man has an opportunity of being disagreeable.

There was one person who was watching the movements of others, and whose *espionage* was of the most effective description. Before the interview of Mr. Armand with the elder Arundel, Margaret's staunch friend Mr. Keckling had received a visit from his trusty subordinate, Earnshaw.

"News, Earnshaw? You look like it."

"Well, yes, sir; but nothing, I'm sorry to say, that you will be glad to hear. That *is* him."

"It is he—eh?" said the old gentleman. "Took his passage as Mr. Almond, did he?"

"Armand," said Earnshaw, spelling the word to his employer. "It is a bit of his own name, sir, you know."

"Nearly half the truth; and that, as a great man says, Earnshaw, is a very fair instalment in these bad times. And where have you traced him to?"

"No great tracing wanted, sir. He took lodgings at once in Half Moon-street, and there he is. And he has called in Gower-street, and has been into the house, and up to Mr. Philip's place; but there he did not go in, but rang the bell, and saw the lady in the garden, with the babe; and he pretended to mistake the number, and begged pardon for giving trouble."

"He means to give more than he'll beg pardon for, I've a notion," said Mr. Keckling.

"Keep an eye on him, I suppose, sir?"

"A close one. Fenning seems worth his salt?"

"He's very quiet, and very quick, sir; and never spares himself when there's work to be done. He'll never lose sight of the man."

"Fenning will do. What has become of that Harris, whom I discharged for his blundering when you came back from India?"

"I heard he had been a street-preacher, sir; and after that a tout to a show. I haven't heard of him lately, but I fancy he has come to grief."

"Let him be found—will you, Earnshaw?—so that I can lay my hand on him if I want him."

"Certainly, sir."

"And specially let me know, either through yourself or through Fenning, what the other man does. Does Fenning think he saw the Spencers in Gower-street?"

"He was in the house more than an hour, but neither of them came to the door with him, which they would have done, very likely, sir, considering who he was, if they had been at home."

"That is, if he told them who he was—and if they were friends. I wish the boat had gone down with him; but it's always the way."

"Born to be hanged, perhaps, sir, which is an assurance, like."

"I'm afraid he isn't; and, indeed, I hope he isn't—not for his own sake, of course, but for that of other people. I've no more to say until your next report, Earnshaw, except that, if anything particular occurs, don't wait for morning, but let me know at any time—midnight, if you think necessary."

And the wary Mr. Earnshaw thought it quite sufficiently "particular," when Mr. Armand had called in Thanington-square, to let that fact be known to his employer the same evening.

"The rascal is losing no time," said Mr. Keckling, "and therefore we must imitate him. Poor, dear girl, she has had a couple of happy years, however, and Omnipotence itself can't undo the past. If Philip behaves like a trump, she may have many more, dear soul."

## CHAPTER XXV.

## AN OLD FRIEND.

"LADY M'CULLOMBICH!" said Philip, one morning, looking at his wife's card-basket. "Why, I thought she was dead. Didn't I read to you that she was dead, Margaret?"

"Her husband died last year," said Mrs. Arundel; "perhaps that is what you are thinking about, dear."

"Very likely—the name is a queer one, and fixes itself in the memory. Did you see her?"

"No; I had gone out for a walk with baby."

"Of course you had," said Philip. "But I wonder what made her come. We have met her about at various places; but somehow the acquaintance has never improved."

"I don't know why she has not called upon me," said Margaret. "I have always assured her that I shall never forget her kindness when I was a little thing coming home from India; but she never said anything about calling."

"Wants to get at the governor, through us, about some raw-boned cousin, who would like a place, perhaps?" said Philip. "However, I suppose you had better call—she *may* want to entrust vast estates to the management of a first-rate adviser."

"I hope so," said his wife, laughing. "Are you going so soon? Duke will be down directly—wont you wait, and see how nice he looks in his new sash and shoes?"

"I'll leave him this with you," said Philip, giving her the conjugal adieu, and lighting a cigar as he departed.

"Five minutes would not have made much difference in his walk to town," thought the wife. "But he will care more about baby when it comes to be a little older."

Margaret, who had a habit of doing at once what she had to do, determined to return Lady M'Cullombich's call directly; but, to Mrs. Arundel's surprise, the energetic Scotch lady paid her a second visit long before the hour when people's invisibility ceases. She, like another Scotch lady of whom we have all heard, was not for standing upon the order of going, when the order of the day was Go; and she speedily forced the brass-bound gate, carried the glacis and covered-way at a rush, and was in the breakfast-room before the servant could bring her to any sort of parley.

"Of course your mistress is at home—everybody is at home now—just say Lady M'Cullombich is here." And she seated herself in Philip's lounging-chair; took up *Bell's Life*, which he had left on the ground; and did by no means drop the paper with disgust, though the first article on which her keen grey eye fell was an account of a slashing mill between Johnson's Novice and the Nobby Nigger. Her ladyship looked exceedingly strong and well, and very little, if anything, older than when she parted from Margaret at the docks. The

face, though by no means handsome, with its high cheek-bones, was wholesome and pleasant; and she had capital teeth, and plenty of them. She was rather showily dressed, but she had not meant to be fine, and what there was of loud colour was really due only to her inability to do better for herself.

"Lord bless me, child," she exclaimed, as Mrs. Arundel entered with the eternal infant—"why, you were a baby yourself the other day, and now you have the impudence to set up one of your own. And a very nice one, indeed—very nice. If I had ever wanted anything of the kind—which I never did—I would have liked one of that kind."

"I should have called on you, to-day," said Margaret, "but I am so glad that you have come up again."

"I came that you might not call," replied her ladyship. "Not, of course, out of inhospitality, which is not the worst of our Scottish vices, but for other reasons of which I will tell you. Is your lord at home?"

"I am sorry to say that he is gone to the Temple."

"I am glad of that also—*templa quæum delecta*—as I used to teach the girls when I was a governess. He is out of the way. Now, as you evidently can't listen to me with that creature in your hands, just pack him off for a quarter of an hour."

Margaret did not quite see the justice of this arrangement; but the good-natured peremptoriness of the Scotch lady would take no denial; and the baby was summarily dismissed, opening, as his mother believed, wistful and wondering eyes, to know what he had done to deserve being so cruelly exiled.

"And now, my dear Mrs. Arundel—for I suppose a matron will not like to be called Margaret——"

"I should, please," said the younger lady, smiling.

"Very well, then; so it shall be. Now I have something to say to you that will require your good sense to be exercised."

"But I do not know that I have any," said Margaret.

"If I had not known it, I should not have been here," said her visitor. "My dear child, listen to me. I don't apologize for taking a friend's privilege. We have not seen much of each other for a long time, for Sir Thomas saw no company; and perhaps I can hardly call myself a friend, or expect you to think me one."

"I found you a very dear friend on the voyage," said Margaret.

"Pooh! I found a pretty and gentle child, and petted her, as much for my own amusement as for her advantage. I claim no good marks for that. And what I am going to say to you now is a duty rather than anything else."

"Ought I to be terrified, dear Lady M'Cullombich?"

"No one ought ever to be terrified," replied the Scotch lady. "But we all need wary walking at times, and just now your time for wariness has come."

"Please tell me, then, at once, what is the matter. I do not care about being prepared for anything, or led up, you know."

"Sensible girl. Well, the case is this. You have made a happy marriage, which has brought you into a very good position in society,

—brought you, in fact, into a family of first-class folks, who, I hear, adore you.”

“Philip’s relations are all that is good to me ; and I am very happy, —very happy, indeed.”

“And you deserve to be so. But there is a snake creeping into your Eden, and unless we take good care what we are about, much of this happiness will be brought to an end.”

“Dear Lady M’Cullombich, what can you possibly mean?”

“I have no desire to frighten you, my dear, and I believe, indeed, that you have too much sense to be easily frightened ; but still there is a surprise in store for you, and it is one of a disagreeable nature. I must speak very plainly to you, at any risk of annoyance.”

“The plainer the better,” said Margaret. “Stop,” she said, suddenly colouring, “Stop. It is nothing against—I mean, nothing imputing any blame to my husband on any account?”

“If it were——”

“I would ask you to be silent. I hear nothing against him except from his own lips.”

“I am sorry you suppose it possible, dear, that there can be anything to say against Mr. Arundel.”

“I do not,” said Margaret, again colouring, but firmly. “But you spoke in so grave a way, that it seemed possible you might have heard—I mean——”

“There, dear ; don’t be ashamed of loving him so well as to suppose that there can be no trouble for you unless it is connected with him. You will learn the lesson that there are other folks in the world beside your husband. What I have to say has nothing to do with his doings.”

Margaret did not answer, but her frank smile showed that she had been relieved by these words.

“But it is grave enough for all that,” said Lady M’Cullombich ; “and for your own sake and Mr. Arundel’s, you must not treat it lightly. When you left Calcutta, I suppose that you hardly remember being brought on board the ship?”

“I remember it quite well, I assure you.”

“Well, who brought you on board?”

“A gentleman whom I had very seldom seen, and whom I now know to have been my poor father.”

“Yes, your poor father,” said Lady M’Cullombich, with a bitter emphasis on the word. “You have not much remembrance of him?”

“I recollect that he was tall and handsome ; but he was in a great hurry, and, I thought, in great anger, though he did not say much. The beginning of the voyage seems like a dream to me, and not a very pleasant one ; but I soon began to enjoy myself, and I was very happy at sea.”

“You have never corresponded with your father?”

“I never did, because I was ordered not to do so. Uncle Cheriton wrote on business once or twice, but only on business.”

“If a daughter does not write to her father, or inquire about him, there should be some reason for it besides her being ordered not. I

should have written home to my father at the Manse, if the Governor-General and all the service had forbidden it."

"But I was also told, Lady M'Cullombich, by those whom I loved and trusted, that I ought not to try to communicate with him until it was his pleasure, and that there were very strong reasons for his not wishing to receive letters from me."

"And it never occurred to you to ask what those reasons were?"

"My Aunt and Uncle Cheriton told me what they pleased, and I had every confidence in them."

"And Mrs. Robert Spencer——"

"Aunt Henrietta also avoided the subject; and as I knew that my Uncle Robert's misfortunes had inflicted great injury on my father, I felt that it was not for me to give her pain by inquiries. It was enough for me that I had instructions what to do."

"You have been very well schooled, my dear; and Mr. Philip Arundel should be a happy man."

"And I hope he is. I think so, do you know?" said Margaret. Lady M'Cullombich touched her hand kindly, and proceeded—

"Now, my love, it is necessary to tell you this. Your father, Mr. Armandale Spencer, is an exceedingly unworthy man; and without paining your feelings by going into particulars of his misconduct, I may say that he is a person whom no English gentleman in India would receive at his table. It is a hard and cruel truth to tell you, and, be sure, I should never have breathed it unless I had been compelled. I see that you have not been at all prepared to hear this, and if I could have broken it to you more gently, I would. Only, you must make up your mind to the truth."

Margaret became very pale, and a sickening sensation passed through her frame. A compound of feelings had been stirred into activity. It was not in nature that disastrous news affecting an unknown and neglectful parent should strike such a chill upon her heart. What was her father to her but a name?—and it is only in French novels, not in life, that such a shadowy image becomes a cherished idol. But she heard all this of the man whom she had made the father-in-law of the proud and fastidious Arundel, the husband of her heart, the father of her child. No wonder that she looked pallid, and that when she had to speak her lips took a piteous expression, and refused to shape the words she would have uttered. Poor Margaret! her trials were beginning, and it is with no affectation of pain that I address myself to describe their gathering around her.

"Dear child," said her friend, after a merciful pause, to enable Margaret to regain something of composure, "I have thought and talked all this painful scene over many times before I came to you; and I had pictured that sorrowful face and those swimming eyes, and I was half inclined to turn coward, and, by writing to you, to avoid seeing your pain. But I trampled on my cowardice; and you, dear one, must trample on your sorrow. For, as I said, it is for your husband's sake that you must now make an effort."

A more effectual spell could not have been spoken; and Margaret,

looking up through the tears that now streamed down her cheeks, listened for further counsel.

"I know for whom you are suffering," said Lady M'Cullombich. "As for your father, beyond the mere fact of relationship——"

"That is much—very much," sobbed Margaret. "But besides that, I have not seen him for years, and should not know him——"

"You would not know him; but you have seen him within the week."

"What are you telling me?" said Margaret, agitated.

"He is in England. He has been to that gate—no, not into the house, but to the gate. You have forgotten the circumstance; but one morning a gentleman rang the bell, and you were in the garden with your child. He professed to have mistaken the house——"

"I spoke to him, on his apology; it was but a word or two—but we have spoken together. I remember it perfectly—baby was frightened at the stranger——"

"And well he might be,—the dislike to his grandfather was instinctive."

"That was my father? That?"

"Mr. Armandale Spencer, as perhaps we may as well call him."

"No, no, dear Lady M'Cullombich; whatever he may be, or have done, it is not for his child to forget his rightful name. And that was he! Why did he come so? and why would he not cross the threshold?"

"For reasons of his own. One might be, that he might not desire to meet Mr. Philip Arundel."

"Philip would have received him kindly, or at least courteously; and I am sure would not have remembered his errors, whatever they are, on the first day he came to see his child."

"My love, I told you that your way was one for wary walking. What you say, makes it more and more clear that it is so. There is before you, in my mind, a clear path of duty; but I fear that you may be led to see, or rather to imagine, that you have before you a divided duty. And if you try to act on this view, my dear child, there is fearful trouble in store for you."

"Tell me what you mean, dear Lady M'Cullombich."

"We have a Scottish saying, my love, that 'blood is thicker than water;' but, like many sayings, it is false, and nonsense. You have, I see, caught at the idea that this Mr. Armandale Spencer, who has never been anything in the world to you that was good, and now threatens to be everything to you that is bad—that he, I say, has some claim upon your duty. He has none. He has himself renounced the relation of parent, and all your duty is pledged to another. I am obliged to urge this upon you, dear, because I foresee that the very first act of Mr. Armandale Spencer will involve you in unhappiness with your husband."

"No," said the young wife, with a bright smile breaking for a moment over her fair face. "No, it will not do that."

"I know little, personally, of your husband, my love; but I conclude that he resembles other men of his order,—that he is proud and sensitive, and that to find himself in intimate connexion with a



bad and despised man like Mr. Spencer, would gall him to the quick. —Do not turn so pale, my dear girl," Lady M'Cullombich added, compassionately.

But she had given words to the thought that had darted through the very heart of poor Margaret.

"It is the key, though," thought Lady M'Cullombich; "and much as it pains her to strike it, that is the only way."

"You," she continued—but with an effort, for she grieved for the sorrow she was inflicting—"you know the temper of your husband, and perhaps his mind,—we wives always believe that we do. How would Mr. Arundel take the discovery that he had married a lady whose father is a disgrace to society, this fact having been carefully concealed?"

"Philip believe that I would conceal anything from him?" said Margaret, her eye lighting up, and her forehead flushing. "No, dear Lady M'Cullombich; if that is all there is to fear, it is indeed little."

"You believe this?"

"Nay, will you not let me believe that I know my own husband? But," Margaret went on, "the sad story you have told me—I must ask you, may I not, how you know so much that has been concealed from me?"

"I know it, dear, from those who have made it their business to watch, and to know the goings out and comings in of Mr. Spencer, but who, though they have told me much, have not told me all. Do not lay any hope to your bosom that I may be misinformed, or that things are exaggerated. Mr. Spencer's history is blacker than it will ever be painted to you."

If Margaret had indulged any such hope, it vanished; the evident sincerity of a woman not given to talking idly left no room to doubt that she had fully informed herself of the truth of all that she had to tell.

"And—and what," said Margaret, in a low and troubled voice, "have you to tell me of—of his plans? You spoke of a first step that was likely to be taken."

"Calcutta—indeed, India—is no place for him now. He is proud and restless; and though he has chosen for some years to bear a tainted name, and to be excluded from English houses, he has now found this condition intolerable, and has returned to England, with the determination of introducing himself once more into society."

"Perhaps, having reformed," said Margaret, timidly, "he——"

"There is no reform for such a man," said Lady M'Cullombich, almost sternly; "and if there were, the homes of honourable men and virtuous women are not the quarantines for him. He is come, I tell you, to force his way; and having discovered that you have married into one of the best families for his purpose, he will use you for it as remorselessly as he would use a dog in a tiger-hunt. Only beware of yielding to his will in that or any matter."

"But what can he ask of me?" said poor Margaret.

"Recognition of himself, and introduction to others."

"How can I refuse to recognise him—my own father?" said

Margaret. "The very thought makes me shudder at myself for having listened to it."

"I do not mean that you are to refuse to admit his being Mr. Armandale Spencer," said Lady M'Cullombich, "though he deserves far worse treatment than that. But he will claim to visit you—to sit at your table—to know your friends."

"But Philip is the master of the house, and it is for him to decide whom I shall receive."

"It is to that I would bring you. If your Husband orders you to shut your door against your Father—I give him the name, that I may put the case as strongly as I can—will you obey?"

"It is a cruel thought. But Philip has a right to say who shall come into his house."

"But you meditate upon your power over Philip, and you think that you will be able to make him indulgent."

"He never was unkind to me; why should he begin to be so now? But you do not know him, dear Lady M'Cullombich. I wish that you knew him better."

"I hope to do so, my love. Meantime, what do you mean to do as to what has passed between us? Shall you tell Mr. Arundel that I have been here, and that you have seen me?"

"Shall I tell him?—certainly, dear Lady M'Cullombich. I have no secrets from him."

"Then you will also tell him, love, of all that I have said."

"All," said Margaret. But I believe that she indulged in mental reservation as to the mode in which she should communicate the news.

"Right. It is right that he should know it; and it is you who are the fitting person to make him acquainted with the story. If he do not receive it with gentleness and tolerance when told in your affectionate voice, and with your eyes full of love, I know not how better it could be brought to his knowledge. And now I have ended an interview for which you will hate me—nay, don't speak—I told you how gladly I would have been spared it; for, let come what may, you will always associate poor Helen M'Cullombich with the painful story she has had to tell you. But promise me one thing—that you will send me a note, saying how Mr. Arundel has borne the disclosure."

"I promise," said Margaret; "and I hope and believe that I shall have to write you but four words—'Like my own Philip.'"

Her ladyship made a departure as  *brusque*  as her entrance had been, and was gone in a minute.

Many a minute sat the daughter, with her forehead bent and her eyes fixed on the ground—an attitude of humiliation, though all unconsciously taken, and the tears flowed fast from her eyes. She had bent lower yet, and where it is no humiliation to bend, before she found consolation; and, before drying her eyes, she sought the happiness a young mother feels as she presses her nestling to her heart.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE OPERA.

It was not decreed, however, that Margaret should carry out her plan of making her revelation to her husband that night. It chanced that he came home exceedingly late, and that in the morning he rose early and left a note upon her table, to wait her awakening, saying that he was gone on a little fishing excursion, and that she was not to be uncomfortable if he did not return until the following day.

This grieved Margaret—I do not mean the excursion and the absence, for she had no selfishness, and was always glad when Philip made himself a holiday, whether she shared it or not—but the delay in letting him know what Lady M'Cullombich had told her. She was perfectly well aware (as the lady had hinted) that she could make an unwelcome disclosure at least as palatable as any one else could hope to make it to Philip; and she trembled at the idea of some one else being before her with the tidings, and perhaps causing Arundel to return to her in anger, or with wounded feelings. And, encouraged by the success of her former venture in the same way, and on the chance of his having missed his train, or his friends, or changed his mind, she went down to the Temple in the course of the day. But Philip's chambers were hermetically sealed; and the clerk had probably gone fishing also, having left on the door an undated permission to the public to Return in Two Hours—a permission which by no means invariably implies that the public will get anything by availing itself thereof.

Restless and uneasy, Mrs. Arundel returned home, but was unable to address herself to any of her ordinary occupations; and even Duke's blandishments were, upon this occasion, insufficient to make his mother perfectly happy. In the course of the afternoon she again drove out, this time taking her son and his nurse, and called at Mr. Keckling's. The old merchant was, as ever, delighted to see her, and professed the utmost raptures with Duke; and upon ascertaining the state of affairs at home, and that Mrs. Arundel would be alone if she returned, he gallantly insisted that she should not return, and should remain and dine with him. As a further inducement, he informed her that her cousins Alban and Latimer were coming. And Margaret, who, for once, felt a species of reluctance to be left with no companionship but her own thoughts, assented; and in Mr. Keckling's good-natured gossip, and in some of his new books, and especially in the grand experiment of introducing his great cat to the notice of her baby, she beguiled the time until dinner.

Her cousins were delighted to see her—at least Alban said he was, and Latimer looked as if he was. The latter was in very high spirits; for he had to tell—which he did almost before the servants had withdrawn—that his short-hand apprenticeship had prospered beyond his expectation; that he had been suddenly taken on trial, in consequence

of the promotion of a gentleman who reported for one of the leading newspapers; that he had been proved to be quite up to his work, and thereupon had been engaged for the coming year, at a salary of several guineas a week. Hereupon the prudent scruples of Mr. Pybus, the father of his adored Lizzie, had given way; and the young couple, who were not going to take a house, or incur any expenses for the sake of show, were to be wedded in about six weeks, and to live in some comfortable lodgings near the parent-house, until Latimer's income should warrant more splendour.

"Very proper arrangement," said Mr. Keckling; "and without having as yet the pleasure of knowing the intended Mrs. Latimer Cheriton, I dedicate this glass of wine to the honour of a young lady who has shown so much real good sense."

Latimer was enchanted, of course, and would tell his *fiancée* what had been said.

"Something should be said, too, for her mamma," observed Mr. Keckling, "who has not refused her consent to make two young folks happy because it does not just at present suit my friend Latimer to put his wife in as good a position, at the beginning of their married career, as Mrs. Pybus herself has attained through her husband's exertions for many years. So here is Mrs. Pybus's good health."

"You were not up, Margaret, when I called the other morning," said Alban.

"I am not generally so idle," she said; "but I had been up rather late over night."

"Arundel, of course, kept you up," he said. "Though he was with me, who am obliged to keep good hours generally, he was a bad boy upon that occasion. But you must pardon us for once."

"Was Philip late?" said Margaret, quite calmly. "It is baby who deranges my hours in the most shocking manner."

Alban smiled, in reply to this wifely refusal to be aware that her husband had gone wrong, and jingled a couple of glasses to amuse the person on whom the blame had been thrown.

A little later, one of Mr. Keckling's trustiest emissaries entered, and brought what seemed a large letter, and what was certainly a handsome *bouquet*.

"I know this is all right," said the old gentleman, laying down the letter, "by Morley's bringing these flowers. Mrs. Philip, drive down with me for one act of the opera and one act of the ballet, and so help out the evening. You will oblige me so much; for I want particularly to hear some of the *Norma* music, and you know I hate going alone."

Margaret looked at her child, and then at her dress; and it was to her honour, I think, that this was the order in which she took the subjects.

"We'll send him home in the carriage directly, and then it can come back for us," said Mr. Keckling. "And I am sure that dress is quite pretty enough for anywhere."

However, men talk nonsense on these points, and there are some subjects not to be lightly treated. Mrs. Arundel, as well as her infant, were rattled away by Mr. Keckling's fast-stepping horses, and

she was to return as quickly as became a lady who had a toilette to make. When she had got into the carriage, she half regretted that she had accepted the engagement, and one of those old-fashioned doubts crossed her mind as to whether a theatre was exactly the place for a person who had heard sorrowful news, and bore a troubled mind. But the feeling gave way to circumstances, as it might well do. If many an opera-box could speak, it would, perhaps, tell tales of fiercer passions, and of deeper sorrows, than were being simulated on the stage, while the occupants of that fashionable cell were, to all appearance, as bland and emotionless, except when it was proper to applaud the divine singer, as becomes well-behaved people. I know of one couple, who had loved, and who, after an hour of hissed reproach and piteous appeal, pronounced the words of parting for ever; and it was all done during one of Mr. Lumley's beautiful *ballets* of other times.

Neither of the Cheritons proposed to accompany Mr. Keckling and Margaret, though courteously invited to do so. Latimer, of course, was in that state of mind in which it is impossible to exist without seeing a certain other person at least once in the twenty-four hours; or, if the difficulties in the way of actual vision are insurmountable, of looking at the blessed house in which the person resides,—and, unless she sleeps at the back, the blessed blinds of the windows of her chamber of rest. There were not above four or five miles between him and Lizzie Pybus. It is needless to say that he walked off at a speed that rapidly reduced that trifle of space—pleasant to add that he reached Lloyd-square in time to find that the family had gone to Sadler's Wells, where he joined them—and that in one box, at least, of that meritorious establishment, there was neither reproach, appeal, nor word of parting.

Alban also took his leave, though professing much regret that an engagement prevented his accompanying his cousin and her friend.

In one of the streets leading northward from the New Road, the lights of a brougham flashed rather closely upon him, and, looking at the carriage, which was tenanted by one lady, he recognised, and was recognised by, an acquaintance. The brougham stopped, and Alban was invited to enter.

"You need not be afraid of being compromised, doctor," said the lady, with a laugh, but neither a pleasant nor a natural one, "because we will keep the blinds down; and you need not be afraid of meeting anybody, because he is gone to Scotland."

"Every arrangement for one's happiness," said Alban, as he got into the brougham. "And how is the cough?"

"O better, worse,—what does it matter?"

"Nothing to you, perhaps, who have only to cough; but a great deal to me, who have undertaken to cure."

"You'll never cure me, and I don't want you to it," said the lady, in brougham English.

"Why don't you do as I bid you? I told you to wrap up and stay at home; and here you are, out at night in a low dress."

"Is it too low?" said the lady, saucily.

"For a cough, a good deal. Won't you go home?"

"No, I sha'n't. I am going to the opera. Will you come to my box?"

"I have just refused to go with some people I have been dining with, and it would hardly do for them to see me in the house."

"Go to them, and then come to me. What's their number?"

"I forget—no, I did not look, for the box came in while we were at dinner; but it is the second tier."

"Then it is Mr. Cackling's, for there was only that to let, and he sent for it while my servant was at Mitchell's. Oh, you have been dining at Cackling's? I know who else was there, then. Is she going to the opera?"

"Yes."

The lady sat back in the corner, to the detriment of a great red holly-wreath in her fine hair, and uttered a little, long, malicious laugh.

"Come to my box, I tell you. It is on the same side as Cackling's, so you won't be seen by them. I'll make it worth your while. Honour. You come."

"Tell me why I should."

"Because I shall be there, sir. You come," she repeated.

"I think I will," he said, leaving the carriage.

Meantime Mrs. Arundel had returned to her friend's, *mise à ravir*, and that feat accomplished in very brief time. In a little time longer she and Mr. Keckling were seated in their box. It was over the stage, being in fact the last of the tier; and when the great artistes "stepped out of the picture" (as Mr. Downton used, with curious imprecations, to vow he should do), Margaret was amused by the novel effect of being behind them.

After a scene or so, the door opened, and a gentleman made his appearance, to whom both gave a hearty welcome.

"I made you out from my box, and ventured down to pay my homage. May I stay a little while?"

"Take my place, Mr. Beryl," said Mr. Keckling.

"No, sir; I hope I know my own better," returned Jasper Beryl, whose acquaintance Mr. Keckling had made soon after the present to Margaret, and had much prized. "Displace Mammon? I am no iconoclast, sir."

"That Mammon is all gammon," said the good-natured Keckling, laughing, for he had not the least hesitation in capping epigrams with the wit; and never was in the least offended at any retort.

"Ha! If your wine is as old as your wit, sir, you have the best cellar in London."

"I wish you would come and try it oftener, be it what it may," replied Mr. Keckling.

"There, Mrs. Arundel, is the very chivalry of repartee. I say a rude thing to him, and he answers me with an invitation. I am abashed, sir—abashed—and will do penance in a white table-cloth—name your day for spreading one."

"Will you say Friday?"

"Friday is said. O, I must tell you a story. I have been looking at a house, which, among its other advantages, is up your way, Mrs. Arundel. Going over the rooms down-stairs, I went into one that was proposed as a servant's bed-room. The walls were green with wet.

'Rather damp, is it not?' said I, to the stuck-up old maid who was showing me about. 'No, sir,' she said, 'I don't think it's damp—for a servant.'

"That was a damper for *her*," said the unquenchable Keckling.

"What a tall man that is in the pit," said Mrs. Arundel.

"One of the *Anakim*," said Mr. Beryl, bringing his glass to bear upon the person pointed out. "Oh, don't you know who that is?—your estate is the more gracious—it's a man named Gladwing."

"Ah! once he represented Kent," I think, said Keckling.

"*Kent* in *King Lear*, then," returned Jasper Beryl. "The man is, or rather calls himself, an actor."

"Very severe," said Mr. Keckling.

"Why," said Beryl, laughing heartily, "upon my word I did not mean it. Do you see anything very severe in that innocent speech, Mrs. Arundel?"

"But you do say severe things, you know," said Mr. Keckling.

"Never," said Beryl,—“honey and oil, honey and oil.”

"Oil of vitriol," said Keckling, promptly.

"Keckling," said Mr. Beryl, solemnly, "I don't believe that you are as rich as you pretend to be. You have several times to-night said words that indicate more brains than Cræsus has any right to. I fear me you are an impostor, Keckling."

"No, I am not," said Keckling; "but I tell you that you deserve the prize for saying bitter things. I shall present you with a medal."

"Of the Inhumane Society? No; make it a cup."

"Very well," said the fated Keckling; "so I will."

"Just so. But not a great rich, chased thing, you know, Keckling—something simple—just a very plain mug, like your own, that I may remember you by it."

Mr. Keckling laughed until the very orchestra looked up savagely.

"Come, come," said Beryl, "Orpheus excited the brutes, but we are reversing the process. Let's be decorous; we don't come to a place of entertainment to be amused."

The opera soon ended; and, just at its close, Alban Cheriton came into the box. He briefly explained his change of purpose, and entered into conversation with Mr. Beryl, whose veneration for the really distinguished men in the medical profession was very great. But to-night Beryl must have reaped small information from Alban's remarks. He was restless, and kept moving towards a point whence he could see through a gap behind the curtain. The *danseuses* were collecting for the opening *tableau* of the ballet.

"Eh," said the quick-sighted Jasper Beryl, "you are eager to study the anatomy of the feminine leg—are you, Esculapius? Well, none of the works of Nature are to be slighted. Why don't you go through that door in search of knowledge?"

There was a small door covered with chintz, which opened upon a sort of skeleton box, or platform, commanding the whole of the stage, and from this the manager could signify his approbation of a group, or discontent with a set scene. Alban went through for a few minutes, and returned.

The curtain rose, and a great variety of perfumery ascended from the

garments of the seventy or eighty young ladies who, with expanded draperies, and gracefully bended arms, began the series of evolutions supposed to describe that their all but perfect happiness in that lovely glade, with the silver lake beyond, would be made quite perfect if their queen would only appear. The modest petition expressed by the extended limbs and enchanting smiles of the corps was granted; the graceful phalanx drew right and left, and made a lane, and their queen, darting on, and gyrating violently, went teetotum fashion across the stage and down to the lights—a handsome, firmly-limbed girl, who thoroughly knew her work, and went at it in earnest. Her face spoke rather more of shrewdness than of sentiment; but she was altogether a pretty-looking—an attractive personage.

Thé *danseuse*, amid very loud plaudits, executed some of those feats that look so easy, and which demand the practice of years; and with a dashing *tour de force*, carried herself fairly off the stage, on the side of Mr. Keckling's box. There was a rush forward of the *corps de ballet*, a group, and the curtain fell on the prologue.

Alban had again been through the door, and returned. He seemed about to speak to Margaret, when a thought appeared to strike him, and he called Beryl's attention to the new grouping into which the girls were being arranged for the opening of the next act. Beryl looked through the door, and returned.

"Mrs. Arundel," he said, "ladies, they say, always like a peep in advance of everybody else. Look here, and see what the rest of the world will not see for five minutes."

Margaret approached the door, and looked curiously upon the novel scene—the girls dropping into attitudes, the countless scene-shifters running about, the stage-manager giving angry orders, and a few—a very few—*habitués* trespassing on the stage for the sake of exchanging some *fade* nonsense with the dancers. It was a busy, apparently confused, and altogether unwonted sight for Margaret. In her newly-awakened interest she advanced three or four steps, so as to command a wider view; and in another moment her eye fell upon a group at the wing.

There stood the handsome Queen of the Elves, panting with her exertions, and smiling at her triumph; and behind her, proffering a shawl, with the utmost attention, and whispering into her ear—perhaps only a caution not to catch cold—was a handsome man, evidently delighted with the honour of paying this homage to the vigorous beauty. Behind him stood a Devil, who was, of course, to take some objectionable part in the plot of the coming ballet.

Margaret obtained one full view of the group—the panting lady—the Devil—and her own husband, Philip Arundel. And then, but for the watchful Alban, she would probably have fallen to the ground. With his arm round her waist, he bore her back to her seat. No one, in the excitement of the moment, was watching the expression on Alban's face.





*Attention.*



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## AFTER THE OPERA.

MR. BERYL'S quick eye, and quicker brain recognised the situation in an instant, and his warm heart as instantly prompted him to endeavour to put matters right. But he could not know Alban's interest in the scene, and naturally turned to him for assistance.

"You see how it is," said Mr. Beryl, hurriedly, while Mr. Keckling was busying himself in restoring Margaret to composure. "The poor thing's husband has been flirting behind the scenes, when she imagined him somewhere else."

"Gone fishing," said Alban; "she said so just now."

"Ha! *Il pêche*, no doubt," muttered the other. "But can't we make it lighter for her? Say you knew that he was here, and that was why she was taken through to see him?"

"I might say that," thought Alban, "with perfect truth. I am afraid," he answered, "that two or three little things have happened—Mrs. Arundel would scarcely believe my assurance."

"Then I'll try mine," said the kind-hearted Beryl. And, giving a significant look at Mr. Keckling, he began a most earnest apology to Margaret for a little ruse which had been intended to give her an agreeable surprise. Mr. Keckling had been in the plot, and that was why he had brought her there. Mr. Cheriton had actually come on with Philip, as Alban could tell her."

Poor Margaret would have believed it if she could, but her instinct forbade her receiving the story; and if she gave a single glance at Alban in search of confirmation of Mr. Beryl's fiction, Alban's well-managed look of compassion would have scared away any credence she might have given to the tale. He said a few words in verification of it, but they were transparently hypocritical, and were intended to be so received. With a sickly kind of smile, much more melancholy than tears would have been, Margaret turned to look at the performance, which was now resumed. The handsome *danseuse* was again before the audience, and was earning plaudit upon plaudit by a new display of her vigour. Mrs. Arundel's suddenly awakened feeling towards the unconscious artist was something nearer hate than aught that Margaret had ever experienced before. Perhaps, had it been analysed, it would have been found to be less of actual animosity against the girl, than of the tormenting but resistless curiosity which impels us to close quarters with anything we feel to be our enemy. Mrs. Arundel would have liked, or she imagined that she would have liked, to be closeted with that girl—to have scrutinized her attractions, bodily and mental—and to have demanded by what special charm, lacked by herself, the dancer could have lured a husband from the side of his wife.

You may think, some of you, that she was making a mountain of a mole-hill; and you know that there are heaps of wives who would have heard with the most perfect unconcern of their husbands

having been seen shawling half the *corps de ballet*. Quite aware, those wives would have been, that such folly involved no particular disloyalty, or quite unprepared, even if it had, to break their hearts for the matter. But I have good hope that most of you will not think in this manner, and that all of you will recollect that Margaret was a very young wife, and a very loving one, and that she had been nurtured in a very anti-Gallican atmosphere.

Mr. Keckling wished her to leave the theatre, but Margaret begged to be allowed to see the ballet out, and actually did remain until the curtain fell.

Meantime, Mr. Beryl, who was most earnest in his desire to restore Mrs. Arundel to the peace of mind of which his accidental and most innocent invitation had been the proximate means of bereaving her, had vanished from the box, and descending into the *penetralia* had briefly apprised Philip of the state of affairs.

The pseudo-fisherman was certainly taken aback by the information, and seemed rather bewildered, and then felt inclined to revenge himself for this discomposure by being displeased with all concerned.

"They had no business to bring her out in her state of health," he said, hastily.

Beryl's bright and speaking eyes looked him through, and under other circumstances Philip might have received a home-thrust in return for his discourtesy; but when Beryl was on an errand of kindness he would not have paused for the temptation of delivering the most brilliant lunge ever executed—of how many masters of fence will you say as much—and he laid his hand on Philip's.

"My dear young fellow, we've all done these things," (glancing round at the book-muslins and fleshings at every corner), "and we've all wished we hadn't. Save yourself the pain of having to wish it. Run upstairs and swear by all the gods that you were here by Keckling's appointment. You'll be believed now—to-morrow you went. Go."

But Philip was not inclined to take this friendly advice, and, with a few words of gentlemanly acknowledgment, he went out at a gentlemanly pace through the stage-door, and was ready in the crush-room to receive his wife and Mr. Keckling in the most gentlemanly manner when they should come through.

They were not long; and Margaret, leaning on her old friend's arm, looked very unhappy, and kept her eyes down in a way very different from her usual cheerful manner of noticing everybody with a curiosity she had not lived long enough in the world to repress, so that Philip was close to her before she saw him, and then she flushed to the temples, and the next moment was pale again. His behaviour was as gentlemanly as could have been desired.

"I am so glad you came," he said. "Our fishing party turned out a failure, two fellows having played false, and I came back to town, and calling here I found Mr. Keckling had a box, so I dressed, dined at chambers, and came on, pretty sure of finding you."

He said all this with something of a marked tone, as if he were registering the story which he intended to abide by, and were giving his hearers notice that it was to be accepted. At last the young wife,

whose ear was painfully alive to the least whisper from him, instantly caught this intention in his tone, and looked up at him, half timidly, for a moment. He did not seem to care to catch her eye.

Mr. Keckling did not exactly know what to say. He was excessively angry with Philip, but had somehow arrived at a conviction that for a third party to manifest excessive anger against an offending husband is not always the most certain way to benefit an aggrieved wife. And luckily, just then, his carriage stopped the way.

Mr. Arundel was pleased to talk, though it might be with an effort, upon a variety of subjects, on the way to Mr. Keckling's, but he had little to say when the latter had been set down and during the drive home. Margaret had a habit on such occasions of placing a white warm hand affectionately in the hand of her husband, but to-night she omitted the ceremony, and he did not seek it. But of course he handed her out in the most gentlemanly manner at their door, nor did he forget any of the proper attentions which a gentleman should pay to his wife on her retiring to the chamber where she and her infant (Philip could not stand a baby's noise in the night), are to repose. He lit her candle, opened the door for her, touched her cheek with a kiss, which may or may not have been returned (I imagine that it was not, and that Margaret shrank, but in the slightest manner, and perhaps with a shiver or a murmur, from the salute), and having wished her good night, refrained from closing the door until she had reached the first landing, when he shut it in the quietest manner.

Then, I am sorry to say, he sat down in his large chair, and gave way to sentiments of a most unbecoming character.

"This was to be the sort of thing, was it? This was what he had got by sacrificing his liberty and his independence; and putting his neck into the yoke, and becoming a drudge who went day by day to slave in chambers, for the sake of his wife and family. He was to be kept in fetters, watched, followed, spied upon. If he happened for once to take a day's holiday, and change his mind about the way of spending it, he was to be called to account, and a scene was to be made. Strangers were to interfere, his wife's friends, too, not his, and he was to have a menacing message brought him in a theatre, warning him that he was no longer his own master. His wife was taught—he would do the girl the justice to say that he believed it had been put into her head, as she was generally reasonable enough but for a fanatic notion or two—she was taught to look hurt and haughty, and when he was ready to make it up, and forget and forgive everything, she was to stalk coldly out of the room, and leave him like a boy who had done wrong and been scolded for it, and who must humble himself further before he could be forgiven. He would be damned if he would do anything of the kind. That was not his notion of matrimony, nor was it the sort of thing that was practised among his friends, Harry Ascalon's wife was a beautiful woman, and had brought him a lot of money (for shame, Philip, O for shame), and yet Sir Harry could go to Baden without her, and no row. Did the Bolterdikes go on like that, and yet Dikey had notoriously given *her* cause to be savage? Whereas he, Philip Arundel, what the devil had he done to be spied upon, and schooled, and scolded, and sulked at? Margaret had indulged a

most ridiculous curiosity, which was only excusable because she knew no better, but which was anything but the thing, and had gone behind the scenes, among a parcel of—(Mr. Arundel here characterized his friends by a stronger word than need be set down)—and because, doing a wrong, a very wrong and undignified thing herself, she happened to see him paying an ordinary attention to an artist, she was to be entitled to a grievance. Or else that old Keckling, who had all his Russian notions of spies about him, had found out that Philip was behind, and had sent Margaret in on purpose, artfully making Alban and Beryl his tools. If Mr. Keckling was going to be a kind of father confessor, and have a private influence over Margaret, he, Philip, would not stand it for an hour, and would take the first opportunity of making that fact known, by Jove. He hadn't been such a bad match, and he hadn't been such a bad husband, and he was not going to be treated in that manner by anybody; and if that was the game that was to be played with him, folks should have enough of it."

And having worked himself into a state of irritation and restlessness, he determined to assert his marital rights, turned down the lamp, turned out the gas, and left the house. The clocks cried One, as he glanced up at Margaret's window, and saw that the faint night-light was burning in her room.

"She can get to sleep soon enough, I dare say," he said, almost bitterly.

I think he felt that he was uttering a falsehood, and that he knew Margaret was not asleep, but most likely either crying over her baby, or sobbing prayers by her bedside; but Philip was in no humour to have the wrong which he had manufactured chased away by the truth. I think he muttered some more unworthiness about its being all very well to cry, but people made their own griefs by their foolishness, and I am not sure that he did not risk a profanity about its being best that people should *not* watch as well as pray. There is a state of mind, chiefly found when a person is quite in the wrong, and has no intention of being in the right, in which no form of words, however cruel, or unjust, or wicked, comes amiss; but there mingles with all this such a leaven of self-conviction of one's perverse folly, that I hope such utterances may, if noted at all by the recording angel, be ticked off as half retracted, and scored out at the earliest period of repentance. Sometimes I have thought that soliloquy, good or bad, is the mental safety-valve, and that we should hesitate to sit upon it.

When I mention that Philip left the house in this ill-conditioned mood, I do not mean that he thought of doing more than absenting himself for a day or so, and giving Margaret, as he condescendingly worded it, the opportunity of putting herself right with him. He probably thought that she would do in this case as she had done before, namely, come down to the Temple to him, refuse to have any explanations, and forget the whole affair in an embrace and a holiday. To tell the truth, and although he was as unreasonable as man could easily be in entertaining such a wish or hope, it would have been well had Margaret taken this course. Let me say that beyond the folly of his

going behind the scenes, and putting himself *en evidence* as an attendant on the lady of the handsome limbs, Philip had done nothing very bad. He had certainly meant to go and fish, and the party had been broken up, though not exactly in the way he had stated in the crush-room, inasmuch as two of the intending *piscatores*, who were rather fast in their walk and conversation, had insisted on catching fish at Greenwich instead of up the river, and had invited three or four young ladies, of the operative persuasion, to join them. Philip had no particular business to be of the party, but he found the arrangements all made, and he hated to be baulked of a holiday ; and so—as one of the young ladies epigrammatically remarked, as she held her glass for some more champagne, he went a fishing—with a hook. It was not the thing to do, nor needed he have gone to the opera afterwards, but it was a crime which, if some excellent wives do not now and then manage to know of it, some excellent husbands are marvellously artful at concealing. Of course there was no excuse for his indulging in a bad temper, and going out at a bad hour. But, knowing what we know of other troubles just then threatening Margaret, we may be pardoned for wishing that husband and wife had been—no matter at what cost of dignity or feeling—on the best of terms.

For, you will remember, it had been Margaret's intention to confide to her husband, on the preceding night, the revelation made by Lady McCullombich. This had been prevented by accident, and it had been prevented again, throughout the day of which we speak, by the events we have described. And I know not whether to concede that it was a weakness in Margaret, in whom I hope we have as yet seen little weakness (I will not admit that her devoted, if apparently misplaced love, is one), that the question of her worthless father and his arrival in England seemed to her subordinate to that of her peccant husband and his unkindness. For the moment, this was certainly her view, or rather, poor thing, her feeling. Remember, please, that her conscience, which would have loudly outspoken had she had aught to charge herself with in the matter of the concealment of Armandale Spencer's character, had no whisper of accusation for her, and that there was no voice within to say, "He deceives you, but did not you first deceive him?" The young wife's heart was full of her new sorrow, and it had strength to exclude, for the hour, the sorrow that was a day old. And after many an hour of prayer and tears, poor dear Margaret sunk exhausted into unrefreshing sleep ; she dreamed of her garden gate opening to admit an unwelcome guest, but the figure that filled the entrance was not that of an angry father, but that of a half-clad and triumphant woman.

Morning brought to Margaret a more balanced, yet more perturbing view of her position. Her husband, having wronged her by falsehood and by an insulting levity of conduct (her mind was too pure, her heart too gentle, to venture an idea of deeper wrong) had assumed an attitude which she could not, with all her gentleness, bring herself to tolerate. He, knowing that she knew all, had deliberately stated the case as he chose it should be received ; had dismissed the matter without a word of apology or affection, and had shown that he ex-

pected her to banish the subject, and resume her ordinary habit of playful affection. Musing on this injustice, and finding the wound less bearable at each probing, and at each recollection of how little it had been deserved, Margaret recalled, almost with terror, the scene with Lady M'Cullombich, and the revulsion of feeling thus caused was in its full and agitating operation, when a servant, with that menial instinct for mischief which must be implanted in the class for a wise purpose (perhaps to warn its superiors against errors which will be microscopically noted and maliciously narrated) took the earliest opportunity of informing her that Master had never been to bed, and the door chain had not been put up. Again, then, Philip Arundel had gone out into society, where he might learn the secret which had now been nearly two days in his wife's possession; and this time he might learn it when in displeasure with her, perhaps with himself, and who could say what effect it might produce? All that the poor girl had relied upon for disarming Philip's probable anger, had vanished—no tale was to be told, with whisper, caress, tears, to a placable and affectionate husband; but a haughty and angry man was to hear it from some cold, or even malevolent stranger. It is a sad, and a piteous thing to say, but Margaret actually looked at her watch, and felt a sort of reprieve in observing that the domestic had been so eager to tell her tale that she had aroused her mistress at eight o'clock, and that it must be some hours before Philip could mingle with the world and run the risk of hearing of his father-in-law. It must be some hours before her husband could return, charged with the miserable news. This was the thought of the young creature who had been but the other day thanking God, with tears of joy, for making her the happiest wife and mother in His world.

It was with a sensation not altogether unlike that of a hunted animal that poor Margaret looked round her, and hesitated where she should go for counsel—perhaps for succour. There was the kind-hearted Scottish lady. To her, not forty-eight hours before, Margaret had said that she would hear no word against her husband, and that when she had told him her story, she should be able to send to her friend a message that all was well. To her was Margaret to go, to narrate her husband's follies, and to own that she had not found, and had not had the resolution to make, a time for a communication of vital importance to them both. Lady M'Cullombich would smile, perhaps contemptuously, perhaps compassionately; but it would be a deep humiliation. For this, however, she would school herself; perhaps she had deserved to be humiliated. Was there no one else? For a moment—and let the gallant Arundel make the best of it—for one moment Margaret's thought went towards her strong, broad-browed, intellectual cousin, Alban Cheriton. He had suffered at her hands; he had been insulted—at least rebuked—by her; but he was grave, and wise, and firm, and she believed good. Should she take counsel of him? Gallant Arundel, you may rejoice that the thought died, not a lingering, but a violent, death. A woman's noble instinct crushed it out, with some indignation, almost on the instant, and your wife did not go, with the burden of her sorrows, to consult one who had hated you, and loved her. That she might have done so, in all



the trust and purity of her nature, and that she would have returned with her beautiful devotion and loyalty to you scathless and spotless, who dares doubt? But again be it said, it is well for you that she chose another friend in this hour of trial.

"I expected you, my love," said Mr. Keckling. "I should not have stirred from the house all day." He rang. "Morley, at home to nobody. Stop!—except, of course, Mr. Philip Arundel."

"Do you expect Philip?" said Margaret, nervously.

"On the contrary, my love. He cannot come, at present, at least."

"Oh, why? There is nothing——"

"Nothing, my dear. But he happened to be witness to a street quarrel which occurred about five o'clock this morning, and his evidence will be wanted by the police-magistrate; he must therefore attend the court. It is one of the inconveniences of being about the streets when one ought to be in one's bed; but it is a trifle to a healthy young man. I should not like it."

"Oh, Mr. Keckling, I am so miserable!"

"My dear child, I forbid your being so. I know what is grieving you, and it grieves me that such a thing should have happened; but we must look at such matters in their true light."

"But you do not know one half of my sorrows," said Margaret, looking piteously at him, with her lip quivering. "And I am sure I do not know that I have any right to come to you about them; but you have always been so kind and——"

"Mrs. Arundel, my dear, please to stop," said the old gentleman. "If you say one more word of that sort, I shall, for the first time in my life, begin to find fault with you. I would scold you dreadfully, only your coming to me shows me that you love and trust the old man; and now go on, without another syllable of apology."

"As to last night," said Margaret, colouring, "I do not wish, dear Mr. Keckling, to say a word——"

"But I wish to say a good many words, my love. But first, a question. Has there been any—I won't use such a term as quarrel—but has the subject been talked of with—with anger or irritation?"

"No," said Mrs. Arundel, in a tone which puzzled Keckling.

"That is as well," he said, dubiously, after a pause. "Though," he added, "when a husband commits a little absurdity, the best and healthiest way is for him to do penance, and have absolution at once."

But Margaret looked sad and pained, and her friend saw that he mistook his way in adopting a light tone. He was about to speak more gravely, when Mrs. Arundel answered—

"Dear Mr. Keckling, I do not think you would be glad to see me—I mean, I do not think you would hold me very high in your esteem, if I had come to talk to you about—about anything in which Philip—in which my husband had seemed to be unkind."

"A good many wives have come to me on such errands, though, in my time," muttered Mr. Keckling. "My love," he said, "I am quite sure that whatever is right, and good, and wifelike is the thing that you will do under all circumstances; and whatever you may have to say to the old man, he will think it an honour to hear, and he will

have pride and happiness in trying his utmost to relieve you from any annoyance. And I will only say one word more, my dear, namely, that there are very few things that cannot be done in these days by a man with a cool head and a good purse; and both of those are as heartily at your service as I can put them so."

Do you know what that good, wicked old man was thinking. It is no reproach to him. He had not lived among the angels. He had a notion that Margaret was horribly jealous of the handsome *danseuse*, and would be grateful to him to get her out of the country, and he was considering whether he should have her engaged at St. Petersburg or the Havannah, or lend some young nobleman, fascinating, but hard-up, a lump of money, conditionally on his carrying her off to Sicily.

"You are all kindness, as you always have been," said Margaret, "and what I have to confide to you is so sad that I shall need all your best advice, and I shall never be able to thank you enough for it. Dear Mr. Keckling, I have had a sorrowful story told me. I have learned something full of shame and humiliation."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Keckling, adding the sort of growl a man emits when something has happened which he anticipated, but which not the less angers him.

"I have had news from India," she continued, in a subdued voice.

"That will do, my love," said he, abruptly. "I will spare you the pain of repeating it."

"Then you have heard it," gasped Margaret, turning deadly white, "And Philip——"

She sat for some moments in a species of blank grief, and looked at Mr. Keckling, but without speaking. He rose, and approaching her, took her hand kindly, and said—

"It has reached you at last. May I ask how?"

"Ought I—yes, she did not wish any secret—Lady M'Cullombich was with me——"

"On Tuesday morning, I know. And she told you of family disgrace and—well, well, it must have come to you; and she would tell it in kindness, I should think."

"O yes, yes; and that I might do the best that could be done—that I might break it to Philip."

"And you have done so," said Keckling, eagerly.

"No," replied Margaret; "I should have done so—I ought—but——"

"But something prevented; and now comes this infernal folly—I beg your pardon, my love—but now there is a sort of estrangement between you."

"Do not say that, please."

"Well, dear, he behaves foolishly, and then goes away from his home and gets himself—I mean he is out of the way. However, we will make all that right. We must act with a little tact, but we will make it right—at least, I hope so. We will have him here by-and-bye, and then we must break the story to him."

"It is from me that he ought to hear it," said poor Margaret; "I feel that, and I hope to be able to do my duty." She spoke rather firmly, but she looked helpless enough just then.

"I do not see that it is your duty," said Keckling, again taking her hand. "It is not a subject on which any woman should be called on to speak, if the same thing can be said for her. There is but one point to establish in your husband's mind, namely, your own utter and absolute ignorance of the state of things until you received this information."

"And if he doubts that, my heart is broken," said Margaret. "But he cannot, and will not."

"If he does, I will hate him to the last hour of my life," said the old man, vehemently. "But he cannot. He cannot look at you and doubt. For the story itself, I will tell it him. As far as a gay young fellow can care for a slow-going old one, I think he cares for me, and he will perhaps be as glad—or rather will regret as little—to have heard it from me as from any one."

"And, if I may ask you," said Margaret, "have you—you have known our sad story—you have known it long?"

"Dear child, to show you how complete a proof I have of your perfect ignorance of all the facts until now, and to show you also how painfully close was my acquaintance with them, let me recall to your recollection what you have entirely forgotten, namely, that I myself told you the story."

"Told me!" said Margaret, astonished.

"With changed names and details," said Keeling, "or you would no longer have been in ignorance, but I laid the true history before you, my love."

"Mr. Keckling—what—when?" said Margaret, trembling exceedingly.

"My love, in that very garden under the window, in the autumn before your marriage. You will remember our conversation, for you have since written it down with great care, and I have your writing in my strong box; but far, indeed, were you from dreaming that it was your own position that I described—"

The cry that came from Margaret was so strange that he stopped, startled.

"A story," she said, in a hoarse, under voice, in which not a note of the sweet tone could be heard—"a story of a bride, whose mother had been wicked, and whose husband did not know—"

"Yes, love, yes; but be calmer—be calmer, for the love of God. You will make yourself ill; there is no need for this. We shall manage to keep our secrets, except where we choose them to be known. Do not tremble so, dear child."

"But," gasped Margaret, "tell me, quick. In that story you said that the father—the bride's father—was a good man, though the mother—"

"I did; but that was to remove the facts farther away from the truth. I know the truth, my dear child, which was and is, that your parents are well worthy one another, and all unworthy, utterly, cursedly unworthy, that a being like you should owe them the only thing you ever owed them—a name! now happily changed for an untarnished one."

But the last part of this speech had been entirely lost upon Mar-

garet, who had listened intently to its opening words, and then without actually fainting, had lost all idea of the meaning of what was said, or rather had lost the power that commands the attention. She swayed herself on her chair, and struggled hysterically for breath. But Margaret was a brave girl, and fought to the last the battle against the overwhelming sensation which threatened to deprive her of consciousness. After some minutes her endurance was rewarded. A violent burst of tears came to her relief, and when the agitation of weeping was over, poor Margaret was able to speak again, and to thank Mr. Keckling for the attentions which he was, in extreme concern, lavishing upon her.

"That's well," he said, delighted as her voice became again articulate. "That's well—that's very well. This—it is best for you—no, the water? There, then, there. Now we shall get calm and quiet. Eh?"

"I would beg your pardon for all the trouble I am giving you—"

"If you dare, my darling. My grief is that you should have such trouble, you who never did any one an injury, or thought an unkind thing of anybody in your life."

"We know who sends trouble, and why?" said Margaret. "But it is very, very hard to bear. I had heard from Lady M'Cullombich about my poor father, but to learn that I have a parent whom I must not name, though she is my mother, is a bitter, bitter grief. And when *this* has to be told——"

"My love, my lamb," said Keckling, himself now agitated, "let me understand you aright. Have I—I told you anything that you did not know when you came here just now—speak, my dear child."

"Do not let it grieve you," said Margaret; "you would have done anything rather than grieve me."

"I am a fool, an old fool, with all my self-confidence. You did not know until to-day—I see it is so—you did not know that Mrs. Armandale Spencer was living."

"I had believed my poor mother to be dead, years and years ago," said she, in a low voice. "But I never heard that it would have been best—best as the world would say—if it had been so."

"Never will I forgive myself," said Keckling; "never on this earth."

"Do not say so," said Margaret. "I must have known it, sooner or later, dear Mr. Keckling, and perhaps it is for the best that all my shame and trouble comes at once. And if I needed your advice before, how much more do I need it now?"

"Never forgive myself," muttered Keckling to himself, as if peremptorily ending some dispute with a third party. "My dear," he said, in a prompter and more businesslike tone than he ordinarily used with her, "the past must be the past. Our business is with the present, and as far as we can, with the future. This foolish coldness between yourself and Mr. Arundel must instantly be made up, and he must be apprized of the sad matters we have talked about. I charge myself with this—but you must undertake another duty, not less important."

"Tell me."

"You have great and deserved influence with Philip's father. You

are a special favourite with him. If it were not so it would be equally your duty to do what I am going to say, but you stand so well with him, that what might be a terrible revelation will be only a disagreeable communication, and you will be good friends as ever. You must go to Thanington-square, see old Mr. Arundel, and while he hears the story, let him see your face, in which truth is written as it seldom is written in these days of hypocrisy. You must tell Philip's father what you know."

"And Philip," said Margaret, tremulously; "might not he resent that?"

"Not improbably," said Philip Arundel. "I am no listener, of course, Mr. Keckling, but being immediately admitted, I ran up-stairs, and opening the door, could not help hearing the last words. I suppose I may ask for a few more, on a subject in which I seem to be interested?"

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE SKY SEEMS CLEARER.

MARGARET sprang from the sofa, and impulsively, yet not without timidity, took her husband's hand. Philip received this attention, with perfect courteousness, and with a smile led his wife back to her seat, and then shook hands with Mr. Keckling. It was very clear that Mr. Arundel felt, or meant to show himself entirely at ease, and rather in the judicial position than that of a gentleman whose recent acts might seem to demand a little explanation.

"I hardly expected you so soon, Philip, though I did expect you," said Mr. Keckling.

"O, a matter like that which detained me is soon disposed of when one knows how to go to work," said Mr. Arundel, carelessly. "It is not worth another word."

"I have told Mrs. Arundel," said Keckling, pointedly, "that you happened to be witness to a street quarrel, and had to appear at a police-court and give evidence."

"Very kind of you to put it so," said Philip, "in order to spare her any unnecessary apprehension. But I always avoid secrets and mysteries, and now as it is all over, Margaret, I may as well tell you that I was the principal party in the quarrel, and was locked up in the station-house. The magistrate nearly understood the case, though not quite, and behaved quite as well as I expected, and the fine was a slight one. I tell you this, my dear Margaret, on principle, because a husband who keeps secrets from his wife always appears to me to lower himself. It looks either as if he were afraid of her temper, or distrusted her confidence in him."

Under the circumstances all this might be deemed sufficiently cool, but neither of his auditors was inclined to comment upon the speech.

"And I am sure," said Mr. Keckling, "that you would hold the same opinion in reference to a wife who had secrets from a husband."

"That," said Philip, "I am inclined to think I should regard as a much graver offence. But I suppose that we need not go further into matrimonial ethics. You don't look your best this morning, my dear Margaret, by any means. I wish you would be a little more considerate of yourself, and not try to engraft your country system of early hours upon our late hour system in London. It is what they call lighting the candle at both ends."

"Indeed I am not very well to-day, Philip," said his wife; "but it is nothing of much importance, and I dare say I shall be better by-and-bye. I am very glad that you have come."

"And considering how long we have been married, Mr. Keckling," said Philip Arundel, "I think it is a satisfactory thing to hear such a speech from one's wife."

Mr. Keckling rang.

"At home to no one—to no one, Morley," he said peremptorily.

"May I, with apologies, ask you to make a single exception to that order, Mr. Keckling?" said Philip. "I think that my father may call upon you, and I hope you will let him in."

"Except Mr. Arundel. This gentleman's father—you understand, Morley," said Mr. Keckling. The servant withdrew.

"I pledge myself that he is not coming to bore you with politics," said Philip, "or I would not have asked admission for him."

Philip spoke lightly, but there was something in his manner which did not altogether accord with his tone. Margaret felt this, and her courage was not re-assured by the perception.

"I am always delighted, I may also say honoured, by a visit from Mr. Arundel," said the old gentlemen; "and I am glad to hear him talk on a subject he understands so well as politics."

"I dare say he wishes the House were of your opinion," said Philip irreverently. It was evident that he intended not to begin the more serious conversation which was felt to be inevitable. Mr. Keckling, therefore, determined to open the campaign; the rather as he had assumed to himself a protectorate over Margaret, and felt bound to be her champion.

"After what you said just now, and in which I quite agree," he said, "about secrets, I think I ought to apologise for something I said last night. I imagined that Mrs. Arundel, who was exceedingly unwell, was startled at suddenly seeing you at the opera, and in consideration for her nerves, I said that we had expected you. As I said it with the best intentions, I suppose you will forgive me."

"My dear sir, you are always kindness itself. But nobody thought of explaining to me how I happened to find my wife (whom I had supposed to be at home with her baby) in such brilliant society, and as I was much too polite to ask questions, I naturally expected—and experienced—the same indulgence."

This was *his* way of describing the silence of poor Margaret, as she returned in her sorrow from the opera, and went, embraceless, from the room. It must be admitted that the adroit use of language is that which distinguishes some people from other people.

Margaret would have liked to say something, but she literally dared not, for Philip, smiling and courteous as he was, had drawn a sort of barrier of ice around himself, and instinct told her that she should get no nearer to his heart, at that moment, by any assault upon the fortification. She should receive, she felt, some answer that could not be complained of, but which would be gall and wormwood to one who never needed, more than then, affectionate, and one may say actively affectionate, treatment. Keckling, too, *vieux diplomate* as he was, saw that the situation was one which demanded what Lady M'Collumbich called wary walking. Still the walk must be taken, no matter what lions there might be in the path, or what pitfalls.

"And now, Mr. Arundel," said the old gentleman; "I have a communication to make to you, which I will ask you (though I am sure needlessly, you have so much self command and courtesy) to hear in all calmness, and to consider well in all its bearings, even before—if you will permit me to ask you so much—even before giving utterance to any opinion on the subject."

"A most solemn exordium, my dear Mr. Keckling, and one that raises indefinite expectations. May I venture to dream that you have bought me a seat in Parliament, and are going to indoctrinate me with the views you desire me to hold? You shall find me docility itself."

"My dear young friend, it is, I assure you, no light matter. It involves a story of painful interest, and it may involve the happiness of persons very dear to me."

Philip spoke more respectfully, as he answered,—

"Is it permitted, sir, at this stage, to ask whether these persons are known to me?"

"My dear Philip, two of them are in this room, and the third is in his little cradle in your home."

"Then, Mr. Keckling, let me say one word before you proceed. It may save trouble and mystification. You know, and Margaret there" (what would that affectionate heart have given, had he said Margaret here, with his arm around her?) "knows that I am the very last person to imagine that any one else is going to commit an indiscretion, and that I always put the very best construction upon everything, to the last moment that I am allowed to do so. But perhaps, among *us*, I may be pardoned if my natural feelings make me a little anxious that nothing should disturb our comfort. Now it is just possible, that you—I will not say anybody else, because I think and hope that is impossible—may have taken an idea with regard to some part of my conduct, and that you may be kindly intending to promote the happiness of those you have so delicately alluded to, by raising some discussion, or asking some explanation. Only one word more. I will ask you, for reasons whose weight must be more apparent to me than to anybody, utterly to forego such possible intention—I will not even hint at the painful alternative."

Philip always spoke fluently and easily, but this speech seemed the result of forethought and deliberation. On another occasion it might have highly offended the benevolent Keckling, but to-day he had too

much concern for the feelings of others to have time to think of his own.

"My dear Philip," he said, "it would indeed be a grave act of error on your part that would justify even an old and tried friend like myself in venturing to call you to account. Nothing of the kind is in my thoughts."

"I am sure, sir, that you will pardon me the idea, knowing how deep my interest is in such a question."

"Not a word of apology to me," said Mr. Keckling, though he would have liked to make a very different answer, and to have given Philip a splendid lecture on his treatment of Margaret. "But it occurs to me, my dear," he added to her, "that what I wish to say to your husband I could perhaps say more unreservedly in your absence. I don't like asking you to go to another room, but as Mr. Arundel is coming I should wish to see him here. Do you mind looking at some new print-books in the drawing-room for half an hour?"

"On the other hand, as I have no secrets from my wife," said Philip, "if you see no objection to her remaining, I should prefer it."

Now, I think, is my time to tell you that Philip had heard from his father of Mr. Armandale Spencer's visit to the latter, knew perfectly well what Mr. Keckling desired to tell, and felt certain, also, that this was the revelation to be made to him.

"I—I will stay—I would rather stay," said Margaret, whose heart was just then firmer than her voice.

"Don't set that wish down to female curiosity, but to conjugal obedience, Mr. Keckling," said Philip, smiling. "Ah," he added, as a loud knock was heard, "methinks I hear my father. His coming must postpone your confidences, Mr. Keckling."

"On the contrary," replied the old gentleman, who could hardly help adding that it was possible the father might more easily be brought than the son to regard seriously a matter introduced, as this had been, by an old and earnest friend.

Mr. Arundel saluted the little party with his usual *bonhomie*, and, to Margaret's satisfaction, kissed her affectionately, as was his habit. Perhaps she wondered when it would happen that her husband would do the same. The state of isolation, chill, and doubt into which she had been suddenly placed was becoming perfectly intolerable to her nature.

After a little of ordinary conversation, Philip (who had gone to the window, and had given that searching review of the condition and appearance of the paternal brougham, horses, and servants which sons delight to volunteer, and which domestics are thought to regard with infinite disgust) returned to the others, and with a manner from which he had discharged all his assumed reserve and levity, said—

"My dear father, I am sure your arrival is most welcome and well-timed. Our kind friend, Mr. Keckling, has been making several attempts to open a subject which ought not to be raised in your absence. Now that you have come, I hope that I have your permission to tell him that he can tell us nothing that we do not know, and that we are most glad to save him the pain of repeating a disagreeable story."



What curious musical instruments women are, and how complicated is their mechanism! The words swept, as a master's hand, over the keys, and brought up a joyous gush of melody. The next instant there followed a low, plaintive murmur, like that of the wind through harp strings. In other words, Margaret instantly felt relieved and grateful; and then came the thought, "Would I have left *him* in anxiety and sorrow, when one whispered word would have set his heart at ease?" And then she looked at Philip, in the hope that he would see what a weight had been taken from her heart; but it happened that he did not, or would not, look in her direction. I think, if Mr. Arundel had not been present, she would have thrown herself into her husband's arms, and sobbed away her trouble; but she was not, poor thing, quite certain that such an act would be approved. She had never happened to behold any of the superior classes in a state of excitement and agitation, and not knowing how they conducted themselves under such circumstances, had self-command enough to remember that she might vex Philip by any anti-Thanningtonian display of feeling. I told you she was a brave girl; and this self-mastery was more to her credit than the loudest hysterics would have been.

As for Mr. Keckling, he was in no mood to feel unqualified pleasure about anything; but for Margaret's sake he was glad to hear what he heard, and that things looked well thus far.

"You are quite right, Philip," said his father, "in saying what you say. My dear little Margaret," (the senator always called her little, though she was not, but Parliamentary folks have a diminishing dialect of their own, and call a yard of talk "a very few remarks, Sir,") he added, going over to her, and seating himself by her side on the sofa, "my dear little daughter will not want any assurance from me, or from any of us, how deeply we sympathize with her misfortune." He pressed her hand kindly, and went on. "But we will not call it *her* misfortune, because we all intend to share it with her, and to help her to relieve herself from it. She knows how we love and value her; and no more need be said about that. We are one family, and the only thing for us to do is to join, heart and hand, and do our best to avert an evil that threatens us all."

If the member for Shacklebury would have talked like that in the House, he would have been listened to. But with the same idea to impart there, he would have got into long syllables, and the absolute advisability of united endeavour to eliminate an element of mischief, which, he was free to confess, he was one of those who could not contemplate without apprehension and dismay.

The tears fell fast from Margaret's eyes, and she pressed Mr. Arundel's hand as her reply.

"I speak for myself," said Mr. Arundel, "and for my girls, Blanche and Geraldine, when I say that if anything could make our Margaret more dear to us than she is, it would be her undergoing sorrow or trouble. Philip has, I know, made her fully understand this. If I repeat it, I do so only because her delicacy of mind might, perhaps, cause her a suspicion of our feeling annoyed or aggrieved about anything that has come up, or may come up. Now she will dismiss such

an idea, if she has wronged us by entertaining it, for ever and ever."

"You can never surprise me, Mr. Arundel, by any act of justice and kindness," said Mr. Keckling, warmly; "but you can always delight me, though never so much as now." And he went and shook Arundel's hand.

"We are all of one mind," said Arundel; "as of course we must be. But the real question is, what is to be done under the circumstances, and this I think we can discuss more freely and advantageously without dear Margaret, whom I did not expect, you know, to find here, and to whom I should have gone on leaving. Philip, suppose you put your wife into the carriage, and ask her to take half an hour's drive in the fresh air, and then come back for me. May we do so, Margaret, my love?"

She was pleased, partly, no doubt, because the arrangement was sensible; partly, I think, because Philip would take her to the carriage, and must have a moment for a kind word, or something of the sort. He attended her to the carriage with the utmost politeness, talking, as they went, about the fineness of the weather, and the good the drive would do her, and stood on the door-step until she had departed, and even bid her good bye, with a smile and a nod. Any one seeing and hearing him would have called him a model husband.

The couclave then took the case into grave consideration.

"Well, Mr. Keckling," said the elder Arundel; "we will now go into committee. This miserable Armandale Spencer, what is to be done with him? I think we agree that it is impossible to allow him to remain in England."

"Quite impossible," said Mr. Armandale Spencer's son-in-law.

"If he can be got rid of," said the more cautious Mr. Keckling; "it would be more desirable."

"One would like to do the thing quietly, and so far as such a word may be applied to the affair, pleasantly," said Mr. Arundel. "I have, of course, turned over various plan in my mind. The first and the most natural method that occurs to me, is the getting him an appointment in a colony. I see the objection that may arise in your minds—the fellow's character is so excessively bad. But I do not think that this would be made a great difficulty just now. They owe us a good deal for consenting not to overhaul certain recent appointments, quite as bad—I may say to you in confidence that \* \* \* \* 's single claim to that capital place across the Atlantic, was that he had done some exceedingly dirty work for Lord ———, and, finding himself neglected, was inclined to talk about it. We had all the facts, and a notice was all but put upon the paper. And there are some other things of the kind. Now, I never ask for anything, and I don't suppose, if I made an exception now, that I should find much difficulty. But the point is whether the infernal fellow would go."

"It is a great chance for him, thanks to his being a rascal," said Philip. "If he were an honest man he might whistle for such luck a good while, which strikingly displays the advantage of honesty. I should think he would jump at it. He should change his name, to avoid scandal, and I dare say he would do very well in a colony."

"I have, perhaps, no right to express an opinion, because my information about him is all second-hand," said Keckling, "but still I think it is reliable. It must be a very good thing that would tempt him, inasmuch as he knows the extreme value of his bad character. He is too well aware of the exceeding annoyance and disgrace which he can inflict at home, to be easily shelved abroad."

"He must have committed all sorts of crimes in India," said the impetuous Philip. "I wish we had evidence of them."

"Nonsense, Philip," said his father, mildly. "Would you like to see your father-in-law hanged?"

"Particularly, sir, if nobody else saw it. But that is the objection, I admit, to what otherwise would be the most desirable of all compromises."

"Well, Mr. Keckling, is it worth while sounding him?"

"We must approach him very indirectly, or he will at once suspect our object, and raise his terms," said Philip.

"I don't care about his terms," said Keckling, "if I could only deliver you all and my dear child, your wife, Philip, from his presence. To anything Mr. Arundel got for him, I would cheerfully add a thousand pounds or more, though all the time nothing would give me so much pleasure as handing him fourpence to buy a rope."

"None of us, Mr. Keckling, will ever forget your kind zeal for our happiness."

"Frankly, you are indebted to my Margaret for it."

"And, as frankly, we are glad to be so indebted."

"I believe," said Keckling, pleased, "that I could get this man thrown in the way of a very trustworthy and confidential friend of mine, and that I could get a peep at his hand, and if you assent, I will try."

"By all means," said Arundel, "and I will see Mr. Gumption, and ask him what he has got to give away, in case I want it. Gumpy owes me a good turn on his private account, for getting an ass of a relation of his into the good graces of a neighbour of mine who had a living to fill up."

"If we were only in Russia," said Keckling, "instead of putting gold into Spencer's pocket, by this time quicksilver should be oozing out at his palms."

"Shockingly corrupt country is Russia, I believe," said the Senator. "Anything may be done there by money, is not it so?"

"Money, or money's worth, as in most other places that I have ever seen," said Keckling, smiling. "Only rubles are easier things to pay over than parishes."

Arundel did not catch the other's meaning, but Philip did, and laughed applaudingly.

When Margaret returned, it was merely intimated to her that the question had been fully considered, and it was hoped that a course had been struck out that would obviate all difficulties. And so she returned to her baby, with a heart a good deal lightened, but by no means satisfied by the incidents of the morning.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## A TRUE FRIEND.

"I AM glad you quite understand that I was no party to my cousin's *mal apropos* entrance upon the scene," said Alban Cheriton to Philip, as they sat together after dinner the same day. For Philip, to his discredit be it spoken, had become tired of the unhesitating counsel of his old and faithful friend, John Claxton, and had sought, as much as he could of the companionship of Alban. The latter had acquired considerable influence over Philip, and, moreover, cultivated our model husband more sedulously than might have been expected from their earlier relations. To-day the two had gone down to dine at Blackwall, and though there was no reason why the table should not have been graced by the presence of poor Margaret, who could have easily left Duke during the reasonable period of a water-side feast, she was left to herself at St. John's Wood. Philip, however, who was always a gentleman, had taken care to apprise his wife that she was not to expect him. But though she was not with them, they talked about her.

"I didn't care a farthing about the matter, my dear fellow," said Philip. "If there had been anything wrong, I should not have been seen there; but I was riled at the notion of my being kept in leading-strings. Keckling, for instance, is one of the gooddest old fellows going, but he rather forgot himself when he thought proper to invent an excuse for me to my wife."

"He was quite wrong," said Alban, passing the bottle; "but as he has put you, or is said to have done so, under obligations, I suppose he thinks he has the right to look after you."

"I shall feel it necessary to disabuse him of that notion in considerably less than no time," replied Philip.

"You know," said Alban, "that I am a quiet man; I live out of your world, and my thoughts are pretty well given up to my profession——"

"I know," said Philip, "that you are about the cleverest party I have the pleasure of knowing, and that if I were in a scrape I should come to you for advice, and be sure that I was served with the right article."

"If you had fractured your skull, or sprained your ankle," said Alban, laughing, "I dare say I might do something for you; but I am not what is called a man of the world. Therefore, my giving a hint to you, who are emphatically one, is a bit of the extreme coolness so desirable this weather. Risking your thinking so, I should say that in family matters as in all others, it is best to begin as one means to go on."

"That's true," said Philip; "and I suppose you mean that I rather let other people manage for me."

"Well, a little, perhaps. Mind, you have 'no right,' as people say,



*A True Friend.*



to take my opinion in the matter, because, in the first place, I am a single man—next, I am not a man of society—and lastly and chiefly, if I had any voice in such a matter, I am your wife's cousin, not yours, and I should, of course, stick up for her side of any question. You have heaps of family allies, she has nobody but me, of whom, moreover, she is not, and never was, particularly fond."

"I assure you that you are wrong. Margaret always speaks of you in the highest terms."

"Just so, my dear Philip. Of course she does. I dare say you know all about it—in fact, she is sure to have told you that the infantine disease called cousinly love came into our family, but that it didn't take with Margaret, only with me, and I had to be cured by finding out that she did not care in the slightest degree about me."

Carelessly as Alban said this, he carefully watched the face of the listener. He wanted to know how much Margaret had ever told her husband regarding the passion entertained by her cousin for her, and especially whether Philip had heard of the scene on the pier, of which interview there had already turned out to be one more witness than Alban Cheriton had designed."

"I rather gathered as much," said Philip. "I suppose we all fall in love with our cousins. I was in love with four or five of them; and the bother I had to beat them all off when I got hold of something serious was a caution, I assure you. They were perfectly persecuting, and I only managed the quarrel at last, by intentionally misdirecting my letters, and setting the girls at war among themselves on their discovery of one another's deceitful behaviour."

"Well, I am glad Margaret bears no malice," said Alban; "and I drink to her health. How is your boy? I have not seen him for a good while."

Nor had Philip, as it happened; but he did not deem it necessary to admit how unpaternal were his feelings towards poor little Duke.

"He's very well," said Arundel. "He is always roaring, I think."

"That's no particular symptom of being very well," replied Alban, laughing; "children don't always roar, except when they have something to complain of. I must have another look at him."

"I wish you would," said Philip. He had, we ought to say, uttered a very gross libel against his child, who happened to be an extremely tranquil as well as tractable infant, of whom his mamma would have indignantly stated that he never cried at all, also an exaggeration, but nothing like Philip's abominable story.

"You know," said Alban, "to revert for a moment to what we were saying, the tone and style of your *ménage* must naturally be given by yourself. My cousin is an admirable person, but has lived in a humbler sphere than that to which she has been raised by marriage, and must therefore be content, as indeed she ought to be glad and proud, to take all her notions from you."

"Yes," said Philip; "that is certainly the case."

"In a few years you and she will be occupying a still higher place in the world, and this is a very excellent—what shall I say—apprenticeship for her, and I am delighted, for her sake, that she has so easy a means of qualifying herself to be a distinguished woman of

society. Therefore, it seems to me that the more you urge upon her the desirability of acquiring the habits of the world—I don't mean as to mere manners, for hers are excellent, so far as I may judge—but habits of thought and feeling, so much the better for her. Again, as I say, I ought to hesitate at giving an opinion—”

“But you talk the soundest and best sense possible, and precisely what I have often said to her myself.”

Alban's lip curled at what Philip, no doubt, considered climax. But he answered—

“Of course, and she will see its propriety. For instance, I suppose that in good society it is not exactly the custom for a wife to go into hysterics in a public place, because she sees her husband paying some harmless attentions to another lady. Margaret may as well understand this, because she made the mistake, and made people smile at you when you came out together.”

“O, damn it, was anybody laughing?” said Philip, reddening.

“Well, yes; one couldn't help seeing it, being behind you,” said the other. “The Seftons, and who are those tall women, with green wreaths, on the second tier?”

“Lady Adlington and her sister, Mrs. Crawley, people I used to be *au mieux* with; I didn't notice them.”

“They seemed much amused. Of course, it does not particularly signify.”

“That, my dear fellow, is matter of opinion,” said Philip, with much superiority. “Sometimes things like that do signify. At any rate, I am devilish vexed.”

“With your permission, that seems to me absurd. Margaret is not to blame, because she knew no better. Is it not your business to teach her better? As I said, I speak up for her.”

“Quite right. I have said something about this, but I have not taken the line you suggest.”

“I don't suggest it—fancy my suggesting to a man how to train his wife! But it is as well that you should not neglect this part of her education. And as I have said so much, I may as well say that, knowing Margaret's character, I know that you will not do much by mere advice, and certainly not by anything approaching to reproof or rebuke.”

“Think not? She is docile enough.”

“Certainly; but the impression passes with the moment. Now, I should like to see her an ornament of society. I shall look up to her, and feel proud even of having been rejected by such a person. But she must get over her provincial and ungraceful ways.”

“Making a scene is not the thing, certainly,” said Philip.

“Well, were I you I should convey that lesson to her, not by any mere talking to, far less by the least harshness, which she does not deserve, but by showing her that the more inclined she is to make scenes, the more chance there is of your giving her opportunities for them. She will take the hint at last, and it will abide by her.”

“I think there's something in what you say.”

“I take it for granted, of course, that any nonsense like that of your shawling the girl at the opera was perfectly harmless—if I



thought otherwise, as Margaret's cousin, I would never speak to you again. Well, there is no harm in such a thing, so do it again, or something of the kind, and let your wife see, or know, that you do it. She has plenty of sense, and I believe that she will not go into hysterics a second time."

"Doctor, your health; your prescriptions are free from quackery."

"My treatment of a woman is to treat her like a reasonable being. I never scold, I seldom preach, but I let her comprehend, by dint of exerting her own brain, what I mean."

"And if you were in my place, you would stay out late, or not come home at all, or go behind the scenes——"

"I don't say that I would do a single thing of the kind. But I do say that I would *do as I pleased*. But bachelors' wives and maids' children, you know."

"Yes, but some bachelors know what they are talking about, and I take you to be one of them. Your health, again; and may you one day be the head of the College of Surgeons."

"I don't know what I have done to you to deserve that wish, but such is life."

And soon afterwards Philip Arundel returned to town with his true friend, but it was far into the morning before the young husband reached his home.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### GLIMPSE OF AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

MR. KECKLING had no very strong hope in the success of Mr. Arundel's plan for banishing Armandale Spencer by making him a public servant, and the worthy Russian merchant had, as we have seen, adequate means to form an opinion of the character of the ex-officer. Keckling had no reason to believe that Margaret's father had re-entered upon London life with any intention of again abandoning that stage. As regarded mere wealth, and the pleasures which it can procure, Armandale had, in India, been able to command all that a luxurious, sensual man could desire, and it was not very probable that he would voluntarily accept the limited enjoyments and routine duties of a decorous colony, after being accustomed to freedom of action and to all the licence of native life in the East. It was, so far as Mr. Keckling understood, Spencer's fixed determination to re-introduce himself into English society; and as he was well aware of the effects of the disqualifying career he had pursued for so many years, he was resolved to counteract that influence by availing himself unscrupulously of the means which events at home had seemed to place within his reach.

But as the senator had the faith natural to his order, that a place was the thing to which all men, electors included, perpetually aspired, and regarded as the crowning glory of life, Mr. Keckling

felt that this plan must be tried and fail before Mr. Arundel would listen to any other suggestion. And therefore the merchant summoned his familiar.

"He is still in Half-Moon-street, Earnshaw?"

"Yes, sir, and I think he means to stay there, for he has had cards engraved with his address, but he has been looking at chambers in the Albany."

"Cards, eh?"

"Here is one of them," said Earnshaw, handing it to his employer. It bore the names Armandale Spencer, in bold letters. There was no attempt at any mystification that might confuse people as to "whether this Spencer was that Spencer." He was that Spencer, and no other.

"How did you get this, Earnshaw?" said Mr. Keckling.

"Fenning got it, sir. I suppose a shilling to the servant in Half-Moon Street got it for him. That's the shortest way, he says, when you want anything off a person's table to look at—a letter, or anything of that sort."

"And how does he spend his time?"

"Very quiet, sir. He writes a good deal."

"Dines?"

"Sometimes at home, sir, but not often, as he says they know nothing about cooking. He goes to the Oriental Hotel a good deal."

"Visits?"

"Not at all, and nobody comes to him."

"Has he been to Mr. Arundel's again?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"To his daughter's?"

"He may have gone once, but it is not known. It came on wet on Wednesday evening, and he took a cab and drove north, and being so wet, there was not another cab to be got, and he went out of sight, but he was home in two hours."

"That cab excuse wouldn't have served in Russia, eh, Earnshaw?"

"No, sir," said Earnshaw, smiling; "but the same accident would have happened, only you would have been told a lie about it instead of the truth. I will say of Fenning, that he never tells a lie to me."

"Has he been to Gower-street?"

"No, sir; but I should mention that a stout person, believed to be Mrs. Spencer, has called upon him twice."

"Seen him?"

"Both times, sir."

"Ah! that is well," said Mr. Keckling. "Did she stop long—did they seem friendly?"

"Confidential, in a manner, sir. The lady was always talking loud, and laughing, but he spoke low, and tried to make her do the same. He also gave her money, and put her in great good humour. She gave the maid half-a-crown, and said a bit of a play to her."

"All right," said Keckling. "Take a glass of wine, Earnshaw. Specially let it be noticed whether any other lady comes to see him, or is visited by him. See me on Friday. Good day."

For reasons of his own, at which, however, the reader will be at no particular loss to guess, Mr. Keckling had kept Mrs. Robert Spencer at arm's length since the marriage. No actual rupture had taken place; but Keckling had managed not to receive her notes in time to answer them in the haste-post-haste desired by the writer, and the *robur et æs triplex* of his well-guarded gate had been too strong to be stormed even by her assurance. It was impossible that she should not feel herself snubbed. Mr. Keckling had therefore to smooth matters a little before he could make use of the lady in the way he proposed to do; but luckily she was one of those well-constituted people who easily forgive an affront from a person well off in this world, and a present of certain delicacies dear to Mrs. Robert, accompanied by a polite note from the old gentleman, brought a most amiable response from Gower-street, beginning, "How doth your lordship for this many a day?" and gently intimating that rich gifts seemed poor when givers proved unkind. Finally, Mr. Keckling was reproached for never coming to see his old friends, who nevertheless still wore him in their heart of hearts, &c.

To do away with the ground of this reproach, Mr. Keckling made a speedy call in Gower-street, where Mrs. Spencer continued to muddle on, sometimes in tolerable comfort, sometimes in ludicrous neediness, but always in her normal condition of scramble and-unthrift. He was rapturously received by Henrietta, who poured out a flood of that kind of personal narrative, until you have waded through which, it is almost hopeless to think of fixing the attention of her class of persons on anything you may have to say. Having borne the effusion with the calmness of a philosopher exhausting an air-pump, Mr. Keckling gradually turned the conversation into the direction he desired.

"And how does your brother-in-law like England after so many years' absence?" he demanded.

"O, he is perfectly happy. Here he takes up his everlasting rest, you know, and he is bringing old friends around him, and making new ones, and preparing to spend the sear and yellow leaf of his life (not that he is yellow in the least, but exceedingly well-looking) in comfort and social enjoyment at home. There's no place like home, you know, my dear Mr. Keckling."

"So they tell me. I never had one, and can do extremely well without it. I fancy that home, matrimony, and two or three other things that are said to be absolutely essential to happiness, are superstitions that people will explode when they really discover how much better you are treated at an hotel than in your own house, and how much more polite every other woman is to you than your own wife."

"O, you dreadful heathen, you! What shameful sentiments! I don't believe, however, that your wish is father to the thought. When did you see darling Margaretta?"

"The other day. She was very well and very happy."

"Bless her. And the baby, who is the loveliest creature that ever came into this world."

"Very well, too, I believe. I don't care much about babies."

"Its grandpapa is dying to see it, I know. It seems odd to call

so young a looking man by that venerable name, but still he is grandpapa."

"And why has he not seen it? Margaret is always at home, and he has only got to call."

"That is true, and I am so glad that I have seen you, because I think that you can help me to smooth away the little difficulties that there seem to be—I should make none, if I were in Armandale's place, and so I have told him; but he is sensitiveness itself, and shrinks from anything that resembles a *faux pas*. You see he has been in England some time, as is quite well known to everybody, and Philip Arundel ought to have sought him out, and paid him the attentions due to his position and their relationship. I dare say, indeed I am sure, that with your influence over Philip, you can easily set matters straight, and blessed are the peacemakers, you know."

The selection of private growls performed by Mr. Keckling during this description of Armandale Spencer was extremely choice, but as the lady went on he rolled her various propositions over and over in his mind, and endeavoured to shape for himself a scheme of conduct with a view to his own object.

"I'll tell you how you might do it charmingly," said Henrietta. "Give one of your delightful little dinners of the olden time, and invite nobody but friends—have the wedding party over again in fact, with the addition of Armandale, and thus bring everybody together in harmony."

"Not a bad notion," said the old gentleman, "I'll think about it."

"Do it without thinking, before the purpose cools," retorted Mrs. Spencer.

"One objection, my dear lady, is, that I have not the happiness of knowing Mr. Armandale Spencer."

"Leave that to me. Authorize me to invite him in your name, and the thing is done. You will be mutually delighted with one another, for you have both travelled, he in hot climates, you in cold; and with the addition of a slight pelisse Madrid's and Moscow's climes are all of a piece, as Byron says. You are both men of the world, and your characters are, curious to say, not altogether unlike."

"You be—something, madam," growled Keckling. "Well, I must see about it."

"Come, we get on. That's better than thinking about it, though I would rather hear you say you would do it. I'll do, and I'll do, and I'll do, is an old saying."

"By an old witch," mumbled the ungallant Keckling. "And what may Mr. Armandale's plans be?" he added, carelessly. "He went into business, I think, after he had left the army?"

"Ah, thereby hangs a tale, you know."

"No; my memory does not serve me as it did. I forget. Wasn't there some law-suit between the brothers—your husband and this gentleman?"

"It is not worth while unthreading the rude eye of rebellion any more," said Mrs. Spencer. "All is forgiven and forgotten, and Armandale has the greatest regard and affection for poor Robert, and justly says that the financial crisis of the period when the misfortune

—the loss of the poor fellow's money—occurred, fully justified Bob in all that he did. And now Armandale has an ample competence—he is not exactly rolling in riches, and, indeed, when I had accidental occasion to ask him for a momentary loan the other day, he was obliged to excuse himself, but still he is extremely well off, and so he can afford to laugh at sorrows gone by.”

“No idea of resuming business here, then?”

“I don't know why he should not—indeed, now you mention it, I think he did say something of the kind, but my mind was occupied with another matter, and I did not particularly attend to him. Why should not you take him into partnership, my dear sir?”

“I!” said Mr. Keckling, fairly taken aback by this monstrous proposition.

“Just the thing, I should think. He is a most clever and skilful man, who understands business thoroughly, and he would relieve you of everything.”

“I shouldn't wonder,” said Mr. Keckling.

“Upon my word, the idea seems a most happy one. Women know nothing of such affairs, of course; but a word of inspiration sometimes falls like lightning, and sets a whole machine in motion—doesn't it?”

“I never heard of such a thing happening, my dear madam; but we learn new things every day in this age of progress. Where does Mr. Armandale Spencer live?” he added, just as if he had not got that gentleman's card in his pocket-book.

Mrs. Spencer told him the address, after searching a couple of dusty card-racks and an old work-box in vain for the piece of paper on which it was, she said, written down; and though she gave him the wrong number (when did a Henrietta Spencer-woman ever give the right one), the circumstance to which we have adverted made the mistake of no consequence.

“Then you will call on him, will you? He will be enchanted to see you, and there is nothing so pleasant to men who have seen the world as to compare notes.”

“It is highly delightful,” said Mr. Keckling, rising to go. “How is your husband? Not at home, I suppose? My best regards to him.”

“He is reading at the British Museum,” said Mrs. Spencer.

If she had said that he was riding on the British Lion, the statement would not have sounded more absolutely nonsensical to Mr. Keckling.

“Doing what, my dear madam?”

“Reading at the Museum. He has determined to study the history of finances—don't you call them? and means to write a book on the subject.”

Keckling was rude enough to laugh, not too goodnaturedly.

“It was Armandale's suggestion to him,” said Henrietta. “Armandale declares that Robert's head for finance is a marvellous one, but that his mistake was his trying to manage paltry private business of his own, instead of devoting himself to more gigantic projects for the public. He failed in one, but could have succeeded in the other, just as a great musician might be able to do nothing upon a kit but might play splendidly on a violoncello.”

"Very true, Mrs. Spencer, very true indeed. Well, my best regards to the violoncello player. I hope he has plenty of rosin for his bow. Good-day."

It is right to say that the British Museum story was all an invention, not of Mrs. Spencer's, but of her brother-in-law's. It was his device for delivering poor Bob out of the despotism of Gower-street. Mr. Robert Spencer was presumed to be daily shut up among Mr. Panizzi's books, preparing a work that was to immortalize him; when in reality he was calmly smoking his pipe, and indulging in the most stupid conversation with the frequenters of some of the numerous hostleries of St. Pancras, his means of enjoyment being furnished by his brother, who had been moved to compassion at the sight of the domestic subjection under which Robert had groaned. This need not be set down as a good trait in Armandale's character, unless you particularly wish to be charitable. It was the result of his heathenish habits. He had lived in the East, where woman is a slave, so long, that his tyrannical nature revolted at the sight of the wholesome despotism which Christendom permits her to exercise, and his aiding Robert to escape from the sway of his wife was, in its degree, an act of treason to British institutions. Mrs. Robert was, however, mystified, and her husband was happier than he had been for many a day.

As for the lady herself, she did not lose much time in dressing herself and hurrying off to call upon Armandale, before whom, and upon rather a slight foundation for so goodly a fabric, she reared a *chateau d'Espagne*, the principal features whereof were that the millionaire Keckling was dying to know him—was coming to see him—was going to ask him to dinner—and was anxious to take him into partnership. Sir Bulwer Lytton says that it is a good general rule never to tell a woman the truth. He might have added, that one chief objection to telling it her, is the extreme ingratitude of such a course.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### COUSIN CHERITON.

ALBAN's counsel agreed too well with the inclination of Philip Arundel not to be followed up, and in some respect improved upon. A very unsalutary effect was being produced upon him by the kind of life he was leading, and by the estrangement which was arising between him and the affectionate Margaret. It is bad enough when a man goes wild ways from folly or from impulse, but when he takes into his head an idea that irregularities of all kinds are an assertion of his rightful position in the world, things are likely to come to an untoward issue. Fate, like Sir John Falstaff with his recruit, is taking such order with him that all his friends are likely to be mourners.

Philip's own instincts, until they had been warped by self-will and by dissipation, would have told him that at this time his conduct towards his wife ought to have been most delicate and considerate.

The affair of the opera might easily have been disposed of; nor was Margaret (grateful in her inmost soul for the kindness with which the Arundels had behaved in regard to her great trouble) at all inclined to dwell upon an unpleasant recollection. Ten words and a kiss from Philip, and there would have been an end of the matter for ever. Nor did the poor girl indeed, in the absence of those little atonements, even venture to contravene his august decree that no more was to be said on the subject. She longed for an opportunity of assuring him how entirely he was forgiven; but Philip had as resolutely determined that there had been nothing to forgive, as the sturdy old captain in Queen Anne's time, to whom that respected sovereign's pardon was graciously brought for having imperilled one of her ships contrary to orders, and thereby sunk or taken three ships of the enemy. The captain flung the pardon at the head of the messenger who brought it, and there would have been a risk, had Margaret acted like Queen Anne, of Philip's imitating, of course in a gentlemanly manner, the indignant sea captain. But setting aside the affair of the opera, there was every reason why Philip should have acted just now with signal kindness. He knew Margaret's nature, and how deeply she felt the disgrace which she had innocently introduced into the Arundel family, and it should have been the care of a loving husband to show that no one else felt it, or chose to do so. The other Arundels were all kindness, and made special endeavour to have Margaret with them, in public and in private; but in the case of a retiring and home-loving woman like Mrs. Arundel, it is difficult, without the decided co-operation of the husband, to get the wife much into society; and Philip, without exactly opposing himself to the attentions of his family, was so little earnest in urging Margaret to accept them, that the kind intentions of the elder Arundel and the girls were constantly baffled. Philip was engaged, or Philip was out of town, or Philip somehow was out of the way when he should have been at his wife's side; and he did not much improve matters by intimating, in answer to her gentle remarks—they never came to remonstrances—that she could always do exactly as she liked, and might therefore be good enough to allow him similar liberty. Poor child! she did not want to do exactly as she liked; she wanted Philip to prescribe her daily occupations, and to stand as closely by her as he could, to see that she followed out his wishes, and reward her with his affection for so doing. He had no idea of any such employment—in fact, he looked upon matrimony as an honourable sinecure, a view not permitted of gods or men. Margaret gradually grew very unhappy.

Unhappy, certainly. And yet if she had complained—had brought her state before any private tribunal of people of the world (I think she would have died first), there would have been a marvellously strong case for her husband, and a poorish one for herself. I think I hear a shrewd good-natured worldly friend summing up the evidence for her benefit. "Really, my dear Mrs. Arundel, the court can't help thinking that you have been very ill-advised to make a stir in this matter. Do look into your history. There were you, a pretty country girl, without fortune or connexion, married by one of the pleasantest and best fellows about town, and a member of a capital family into the

bargain. They treated you with all affection ; the father furnished a nice house for you, you have a good allowance, a charming baby, and really everything that a woman can want in the world. And though a black cloud threatened you—and there really would have been an excuse for black looks—everybody has made light of it, and you are treated with the utmost consideration. And just because your handsome young husband, who has so many social qualities that people court him, likes occasionally to stay out a little late, and to have a little pleasure in which you could not as a mother take your share, and because he does not go into lovers' transports when you meet (you admit that he is a perfect gentleman), you come forward and say you are unhappy. Upon the court's word, Mrs. Arundel, you are a little unreasonable. The court can tell you that hundreds of girls would only be too happy to be unhappy on such terms. We fear, ma'am, that your health is not very good, and is acting on your spirits and temper, and the court strongly recommends you to try a little sea air—Scarborough, now, is a very charming place, or Lowestoft ;—suppose you try six weeks of that sort of thing, and see whether it will not bring you to a better sense of your advantages. As a religious kind of woman, you must be aware that for what we have received the Lord is asked to make us truly thankful, and so forth ; and the court sincerely hopes that you habitually attend to your religious exercises. The court is very sorry, Mrs. Arundel, but we must really dismiss your petition, with costs."

Such would, no doubt, be the judgment ; and the world would remark upon it, that it was "devilish sensible, too ;" and the woman would be entirely to blame if, after such a warning as that, she made things unpleasant, or forgot herself in any way. And this settled, we will go on with her story.

Alban Cheriton, in performance of the promise so kindly given to his friend at Blackwall, chose an early day for going up to St. John's Wood to see Margaret's baby. Naturally, of course, he selected a time when Margaret herself was likely to be at home ; for how can a medical man satisfactorily judge of the condition of a child without hearing what its mother has to say upon the subject ? A servant whose to-morrow's holiday depended upon her being able to be spared, would report a night of the fiercest whooping-cough as "a little hacking, M'm, as would be better if the dear were kep at homie for a day." Therefore Alban was perfectly right in his selection of his hour ; besides, why should he not wish to see his cousin Margaret ?

But why, before going from his house, does the young surgeon retire to his room—that in which we saw him with the book and the skull before him ? Why does he carefully lock the doors and see that the keys are so turned in the locks that the most practised spy outside could learn nothing through the key-hole ? Why ?—but as we are not inside the room with him, and as it is of no use trying to peep, we cannot tell what else he may be doing. Only we know that he is locked up for half an hour, and is very quiet during that time. Perhaps he is saying his prayers.

"I don't think there is much the matter with him, Margaret."



"Not much!" repeated the mother, anxiously. "But you do think, Alban, that he is not well?"

"No, I do not go so far as that. He is delicate, that is certain; but there is no derangement of function that I am aware of, and, assuredly, there is no disease of any kind. I think he requires care, great care."

"And that I think I may say he has," said Margaret, simply. He was never out of her thoughts, and very little out of her sight.

"You must not entrust him to nurses more than you can help. There is nothing like a mother's eye, and hand, and voice. This is important at his age. I dare say that you have a very good nurse, but none of them have—it is not in nature that they should have—the vigilant interest of a parent. A mother is a child's second set of senses."

"But I never leave Duke, Alban, if I can avoid it. Whenever I am at home, day and night, he is with me, and I am never out for more than an hour or two. The evening at the opera, when you were there, was the last time I have been away."

"But when you go to dinner parties, or evening parties——"

"I assure you—I don't know how it is—but we have been to none lately. I have had some invitations, but something has prevented my going. Philip, of course, is out a good deal, for it will not do, he truly says, to let our acquaintance drop away; but I have been quite a hermit."

"That I do not like. It is not good for any one to be always in the same scene and with the same people. And you are companionless. It is certainly unhealthy, and I suppose must be very dull."

"Duke is a great companion to me, bless his life," said his mother, pressing the child's soft cheek against her own. "He lets me say just what I like to him, and never tells me I talk nonsense—do you, Duke? No, he isn't so rude to his mamma; and he smiles at her observations, and receives things as they are meant, and is altogether a perfect little Chesterfield; are you not, Duke?"

You don't know, my dear friends—but I do—why at this moment I hate that Alban Cheriton with a savage hatred, or that I should especially exult to see him fall down in a fit. But he will not. On the contrary, he is smiling at the child as it nestles its head on its mother's shoulder; and he is tickling its face with the feather-end of a pen, and making it laugh shyly, and as if not quite sure that it was not being taken an unwarrantable liberty with.

"You must get him out of town, Margaret. I have been considering the whole case, both before I came here, and since. He wants country air, and the sooner he has it the better."

"Philip has not decided where we go this year, but——"

"But you must decide for him—at least as far as baby is concerned, as the matter may take a more serious turn than we expect."

Margaret was as pale as her infant in a moment.

"But you say there is nothing serious, nothing to alarm me, Alban."

"I say so still. But Duke is at that period of life when an attack of any kind may come suddenly, and if the constitution is not strengthened and ready to resist it, we may get into trouble. Were I you, I would not let my movements be dependent on Philip's. I am sure that, under the circumstances, he would not wish it. Where is he?"

"He is in the country, in Derbyshire, I believe, though he left it a little doubtful."

"And will be home ——"

"That is rather uncertain."

"But you know where to write to him?"

"Yes, but I do not know when he will receive the letter," said Margaret.

"That would be awkward, in case of need," said Alban. "Suppose that you were ill, or the child were ill, Philip ought to be within telegraph reach."

"He knows, at least he hopes, that I shall not be ill," said Margaret, with a smile, not so cheerful as it might be, "especially as I seldom tell him of any of my ailments, and he knows I am here to take care of baby."

"Hm," was Alban's answer. "Well," he continued, "I take upon myself the responsibility of saying that Duke must go out of town. I told Philip that I was coming to see him, and he especially begged me to do so, as I suppose he has told you."

Philip had either utterly forgotten all about it, or not chosen to mention it. Margaret's heart, always ready to find good in everything, received what Alban said as proof of Philip's interest in his child, and of his desire to spare her any preliminary anxiety.

"He did not tell me," she said, with a slightly heightened colour, "for I suppose he did not want to frighten me, which was very kind of him. But, my dear Alban, Duke's going out of town means my going out of town—for of course it is utterly impossible for him to go without me, as you just said."

"Quite."

"Some days may pass before I can consult Philip."

"You must not wait to consult Philip. I take on myself, I tell you, the responsibility of ordering you out of town. Simply write and tell him where you are going, and he can follow you on his return."

"A journey is nothing in these days, is it?"

"Not such a one as you should take."

"And where ought we to go—to the sea-side, do you think?"

"Not into too bracing an air at first. We may move you round, hereafter, into another climate, but take it easy at first. Do you know Hastings?"

"No; is it a nice place?"

"Parts of it are nice; and if the Board of Health had power to hang, as I hope to see it have some day, Hastings might be made perfect. I should send you to a place far away from anything objectionable. Now, can you go to-morrow, by a mid-day train, as if so, I will write to-night, and secure lodgings for you."

"Day after to-morrow, please," said Margaret, pleadingly; "I have so many things to attend to."

"That is the mistake that stops thousands of pleasant journeys. Attend to nothing, but go away. You will find, on your return, that things have gone on just as well as if you had fidgeted yourself to death."

"It must be the day after to-morrow, nevertheless," said Margaret, "for such a number of reasons. And will you be so kind as to write to-night, and I will write to Philip."

"Let me write here," said Alban, crossing to Margaret's desk; "and I can post the letter in my way back, and then all will be safe."

He sat down to write, and Margaret left the room with the baby.

When she came back, Alban's letter was not quite finished, which rather surprised her, as he had been celebrated for a habit of ready and brief composition; but he made some remark about forgetting the address, and promised to write from his own home. Then he went away.

Margaret Arundel unhesitatingly made up her mind to follow his advice. The only question which had occurred to her to give her pause, was whether her husband would approve her thus suddenly leaving her home without his sanction being previously obtained to such a step. But she believed it was impossible that under the circumstances Philip could be displeased at her taking the course recommended by Alban; and even had she supposed that Mr. Arundel could manifest any dissatisfaction with that course, the mother felt ready to brave any pain which she might be caused by his displeasure, which she knew could be but temporary. And again, his having made Duke's health a subject for consultation with Alban, and his having requested her cousin to visit the child, and advise upon his condition, seemed proof to her that Philip was, if less demonstratively interested than herself in his beautiful heir, as sincerely attached to him—as careful of him. For it is easy to believe those whom we love loved by others.

On the following day Alban sent her word that he had telegraphed to Hastings, and had secured the apartments he desired, and he gave her the necessary directions as to the railway train by which she was to travel.

Margaret had not heard from Philip, but before going she, of course, wrote him a long letter, telling him what Alban had said, and the step she had consequently adopted, and she added an affectionate hope that he would join her at Hastings as early as his arrangements would permit. And by way of enriching the letter, she guided a pen in the tiny hand of Duke, making him send his love to papa, and his petition that papa would come and see the little traveller in his new home by the sea. While tracing this, Margaret thought of the christening banquet, and the touching hope then expressed by the paternal orator, that his child might live to wander "like a breeze," on the sea-shore, and be as happy there as his father and mother had been in the days of their early acquaintance; and though this kind of unescorted flight was not quite the way in which she had hoped they would have proceeded to carry out the wish, still the recollection, at such a moment, gave her pleasure, and a tear or so that dropped upon her baby was

not a tear of grief. It takes but a small ray of sunshine to light up the recesses of a loving heart.

"And now, baby, you really must go down while mamma makes up her letter, or else it will not be a neat and pretty one. Now go and teach Fizz his book, darling, and mind he reads properly."

Fizz was all life and delight at the sound of his name, and the play-fellows were soon in the most confidential intercourse.

Margaret, searching in her desk for an envelope, suddenly lighted on one of Philip's letters. She was surprised at the sight, for she had treasured these epistles with great care, locking them away in one of her most secure strongholds.

"How could I have left this one out," she said.

It was a long letter, too, the fourth side being covered with writing, and it was without its cover, and lying so that she could read a portion without taking it up; and she amused herself, as we sometimes do, by thus puzzling at the character of a paper that unexpectedly meets our eyes.

The words she read were certainly not of the kind one leaves exposed in an unlocked desk to the curiosity of servants. Tenderness and affection breathed in every line, and Philip spoke of his perfect content, his confidence, and his love. Margaret read with delight, yet with some bewilderment; for though the sentiments were those he had, in their days of courtship and early wedlock, constantly expressed, there was something fresh to her in the language, and she had, as she believed—and had good right to believe—most of his letters by heart. It was with a slight flutter, and yet a smile, that she took up the document, and even teased herself for a moment or two longer by going on with the words before looking back to the date to see when the letter was addressed to her.

Then she looked to the first page—to the beginning of the letter—and then she read—

*"My own dear little Maria!"*

Slowly, and with swimming eyes, from which she indignantly brushed, not tears, but a blinding film which came over them, as if to hide the cruel paper from her, Margaret read the entire letter. It was from Philip, when staying with some distinguished friends in Scotland, and was full of kindness and apparent love for a woman, several times addressed with an endearing epithet, as Maria, and whom he hoped soon to rejoin, meantime sending her some little *gage d'amour*, and bidding her rely on her being constantly in his thoughts, and on his eagerness to be again in her arms. Yes, to the very end she read it.

Every one has seen that noble and tragic picture, in which a great painter of our own day has embodied three scenes of a terrible story of a husband's wrongs, a woman's crime, and the sin of the parent visited upon the children. All unlike, save in the beauty of her form and in the prostration of her attitude, was our Margaret to the guilty creature whom Augustus Egg has sketched on her own floor, in the agony of shame and sorrow. But as that woman lies on the ground, amid her insulted household gods, lay, in the presence of her affrighted child, poor Margaret Arundel.



*A Misdelivered Letter.*



## CHAPTER XXXII.

## SANS ADIEU.

"SEND for Lady M'Cullombich," were the first distinct words which Mrs. Arundel uttered to her bewildered servants, who, summoned by the despairing cries of Duke, had raised from the ground the heart-stricken wife, and were trying such remedies as occurred to them in their haste and alarm. And in a comparatively short time, which alternately seemed to Margaret the passing of a few crowded minutes, and then an age, her Scottish friend was beside the bed on which Mrs. Arundel had been laid.

The visitor removed her bonnet and shawl, placed a chair near the bed, and having dismissed the servants, and taken care that they were not listening at the door, she sat quietly down by Margaret, took her hand, and said—

"As I expected, my love. You have told the story, and it has been unkindly received."

Margaret gazed at the speaker with a sort of wonderment. The story. The existence of a disreputable father, who had returned to England, and would be a disgrace to the proud Arundels. It had almost passed from her memory. What had she not gone through since she parted from Lady M'Cullombich, promising to write a few words to say how "her own Philip" had received the information. Her own Philip! The opera-dancer's Philip. His dear little Maria's Philip. Anybody's but hers. And she lay back sobbing, but not violently. Her prostration had been too complete for the agitation which most women evince in the hour of distress.

Suddenly she rose up.

"The letter, the letter?" she gasped.

"Is here, love," said Lady M'Cullombich; "is it not? This had fortunately fallen under a chair in the room where they tell me you were found, and it caught my eye before your servants had had time to discover it. Here it is, whatever it is."

"Keep it. Do not give it to me," said Margaret, shuddering.

"It is your husband's writing, I conclude, love."

"It is Mr. Arundel's writing," said the wife. "Keep it."

"Am I to read it?" asked Lady M'Cullombich. "I suppose I had better, and save you explanations."

"Don't let me see you reading it, please," said Margaret, faintly. "Go where I cannot see your face."

Lady M'Cullombich passed into a dressing-room, and rapidly mastered the contents of the letter, and its character. At least she perceived that it was a warmly written effusion on the part of Philip Arundel, and that Margaret was not its object; but she misconceived one fact, which she deemed important.

"I understand, my love," she said, taking Margaret's hand once

more, and trying to arrange her disordered hair. "You are in God's hand, and he sends such sorrows. May he forgive those who cause them."

"O, Lady M'Cullombich!" said Margaret, piteously. And clasping her friend tightly round the neck, the poor girl's tears flowed fast and bitterly.

"No man ever lived who was worth those tears," said Helen M'Cullombich. "We make our wretched idols, and then we repine because they are but common clay. You have had your eyes cruelly opened to the truth, love; but perhaps it is for the best that the truth should come thus early to you."

She spoke, well aware that her words were scarcely heard and not at all heeded by the sobbing creature in her arms.

"So soon after his marriage, too. It is hard," said Helen.

This speech Margaret caught, and again looked up wonderingly at her friend, but lacked the energy to reply. She pointed, however, to the letter, which Lady M'Cullombich had thrown on the bed.

"I see, August, and this is only September. Eh," said Lady M'Cullombich, suddenly. "Why, my child, this letter is three years old. It was an affair before marriage. Bless me, my love," said Helen, quite radiantly, "what are we making a fuss about? What fools we are for overlooking the date; but I am the worst, as I call myself a woman of business."

She quite held up Margaret in her vigorous arms, and looked astonished that her discovery did not impart instant consolation.

"Ah!" she said. "I see. The acquaintance has been—say it is not so—it has not been renewed."

"No, no," said Margaret, hastily, and flushing crimson.

"Then, my dearest child," said Helen, almost remonstrating, "why is all this agitation? I cannot comprehend it. Why has the letter—is this the letter? There was no other, which a servant has taken? I will have it from her in five minutes, if it be so. I see a policeman passing." And the energetic lady, once more herself, had her hand on the bell-handle.

"There is no other letter," said Margaret. "Is not that enough?"

"I do not seem quite to understand the case," said Helen M'Cullombich, sitting down, but not very near her friend. "Your servants tell me that, hearing your child scream violently, they ran up, and found you had fainted. I find you on your bed in a state of agitation, and all I see at present in explanation is a letter written by Mr. Arundel to some girl or other, most likely before he ever saw you, certainly long before you were married. I came expecting to find you in a real trouble, not an imaginary one. I am glad, my dear, that the real one has been so easily got rid of that you have so much thought to spare for nonsense."

Poor Margaret was in no condition to utter what she felt—her lips repeated, almost inaudibly, "nonsense."

"My dear child, what else can I call it? What have you to do with what Mr. Arundel did in other days. You are so good and so desirous to be right in all matters, that I am sure you will not be angry with me for telling you that a wife is supposed to know nothing



of such affairs. Philip would feel that the grievance was on his side, not yours, if you ever hinted at such a thing."

Margaret was silent.

"Of course," continued her monitrix, "it is all very shocking, but men lead the sort of life they choose, and think they are angels and examples if no one can prove anything against them when they have settled. You did not suppose that you had married a young gentleman who was different from other young gentlemen. Come, be rational, my dear child. You have your husband's whole heart now; so put that letter into a candle-flame, and dismiss it from your mind. Where are your Vesta-matches?"

"Not for the world," said Margaret, seizing the letter, folding it, and placing it under a pillow—not that upon which she was lying.

"You are rather less sensible than I believed you, my dear," said Lady M'Cullombich; "but I am glad to see that you are getting so much better that you can meditate the future. I should like to know, though, what you are going to do with that letter—because it would be for the manifest happiness and peace of the world, if a law were made that no letter should ever be preserved twenty-four hours after it was received."

"I must keep this one," said Margaret, humbly. "It was very kind of you to come to me, dear Lady M'Cullombich."

"Stuff, child. But I do not know that I should have come in such a hurry, if I had known what was the matter. Tell me, now, if you are calm enough, what has passed about your father."

"All was known," said Margaret, in a low voice.

"All was known," repeated Lady M'Cullombich, slowly.

"More than you had told me."

It was Lady M'Cullombich's turn to colour, which she did through her healthy bronze.

"If I concealed anything, my dear, it was from no love of concealment, but because I thought that one part of the sad story might be hidden for ever."

"All is well," said Margaret, still faintly. "All was well," she added, as to herself.

"The Arundels see the history in the right light, as regards you?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then, as you say, all is well. Then you are to be congratulated, my dear, and I congratulate you heartily. With a good understanding among yourselves, you may set Mr. Armandale Spencer at defiance; and I doubt not that means will be found to get rid of him from this country."

"Perhaps so," said Margaret, dreamily.

"My love, I quite understand all about it now. You have been agitated, and nervous, and restless for some days about this matter; and it was quite of importance enough to justify your being so. And having made yourself ill, or at least peculiarly sensitive to impressions, there comes that wretched letter—you don't tell me how you lighted upon it, or whether it was sent to you—yes, it must have been sent to you. Mr. Arundel would not be likely to keep one of his own letters."

"Do you know," said Margaret, suddenly rousing herself to the subject nearest her heart, "that is a mystery to me. I was searching the desk, downstairs, and the letter was there."

"A locked desk?"

"Sometimes I have locked it ; not lately. Nothing of consequence was kept there."

"Anybody could go to it?"

"Nobody ever did, except Mr. Arundel and me—there was only writing-paper, and that sort of thing."

"Mr. Arundel ;—by the way," said Lady M'Cullombich, interrupting herself hastily, "tell me, was he all that you could desire, all that you could expect, then, about the discovery? Was he, in a word, all kindness and consideration, as you hoped, dear, if I did not dare to hope so strongly, that he would be."

"He was all that was—that was courteous and respectful—"

"Courteous and respectful! You are his wife—courtesy and respect to a woman when passionate affection is due to her, are wrong and insult, and far worse offences than unkindness and outrage. I have no right to ask, however. It is a question between husband and wife."

"You have a right to my confidence in this matter, dear Lady M'Cullombich. I have told you the manner in which Mr. Arundel behaved."

"Then he behaved ill."

Margaret, for the first time, was silent when her husband's conduct was impugned. After a pause, she said,—

"It is not for me to complain : and there was another thing which happened—it was at the Opera—nothing of consequence, but it might have helped to make him colder than—than he would, perhaps, have been."

"A matter in which he was in the right and you in the wrong, of course."

"No," said Margaret, colouring.

"Ah! Then he was wrong on one occasion, and therefore, like a man, behaved ill to you on another. And he was in the habit of going to this desk, you say," asked Lady M'Cullombich, abruptly.

"What of that?" gasped poor Margaret.

"God forgive me if I think worse of men, husbands, than they deserve," said Helen ; "but it would be hard. I have known of such things as would make the bravest woman tremble at entrusting her happiness and her salvation to another—but pass that now. You are better, much better, dear, and some calm sleep will restore your nerves."

"Sleep," murmured Margaret. "I feel that there is but one sleep in which I shall ever be calm again ; and if it were not for my child, my own one, God knows, I would not care how soon that sleep came to me. But you have put a new thought into my mind—what did you mean just now? Not, O in mercy! not what crossed my poor brain as you spoke."

"Tell me, love."

"You did not mean that Philip put the letter there, knowing that

"I should find it?" It was in her agony, only, that she had called him by his Christian name.

"The shameful thought crossed my mind too," said Helen, shocked at the new sorrow she had caused, and desirous to soften it. "But it was for a moment only, and I was wrong—evidently wrong. It would be absurd to suspect him of doing so—what end could he gain? It would be wanton folly. A man has the good taste, if not the good feeling, to conceal even his old love affairs from his wife, and your husband is a gentleman at heart. The idea was a ridiculous one. Send it away, and let us think who else could have placed the letter there. Any one, you say, could get to the desk."

Margaret's look was piteous—it showed that an abiding idea had fastened upon her.

"Yes, yes," continued Helen, "we must trace this. It is a duty to ourselves, to everybody."

She took the letter from under the pillow, and looked through the pages as if seeking to gain a hint. There was no envelope—no postmark.

"Had your servants, or either of them, known Mr. Arundel or his family?"

"No."

"Has he, or have you, scolded them lately, or refused them any indulgence, or given them warning? Because, if so, this is just the way a servant would take revenge—find a letter in a coat pocket, or somewhere, and put it where it would occasion mischief."

"I have never done anything to deserve their dislike. Mr. Arundel is cold and distant with servants, but never condescends to anger. Yet, now you recal it, I noticed that Hannah was very eager, a day or two ago, to tell me something that vexed me."

"They are all that, unless it tells against themselves, my dear. But was it something about Mr. Arundel?"

"Yes. But nothing of consequence."

"That is nothing—when a low person cannot fire a pistol at you, he will discharge a squirt. The case is evidently this, my dear. One of you has offended one of your servants, who, having found that letter, has used it for your mortification, and is now exulting in her success. It is not worth while revenging oneself on such a creature."

"Do not speak of anything so wicked as revenge," said Margaret. And she again became silent.

Neither woman believed in the solution Helen had given. But she compassionated Margaret, and sought to turn her thoughts in another direction than that they had taken. Margaret was not led away for a moment. Lady M'Cullombich had struck a new chord, hitherto unsounded, and now all that Mrs. Arundel desired was that her friend would go away, and leave her to a sensation which she had never experienced, and which, with all its pain, had something in it that was sustaining. Margaret became, or seemed to herself to become, rapidly better and stronger. She rose from the bed and arranged her dress and hair.

"I must ring for poor little Duke," she said; "I am afraid I have frightened him past forgiveness."

"Let me go, first," said Lady M'Cullombich, who, with female freemasonry, perceived that Margaret had no more to say to her that might not be said at any time. "I am glad, love, to find that you have become so much more reasonable—you see that the letter that annoyed you was an old affair, and told you that only which nineteen women out of twenty would hear if their husbands were careless or their servants were malicious. And you will not give your wretched enemy any further victory? That is well. God bless you; and mind, I love you for sending for me in your trouble, and though I hope you will have no more trouble, send for me again if it should ever be so."

"No," said Margaret to herself, as the street door closed on her friend. "No; you are a good, kind woman, but you do not quite understand Margaret Arundel."

She repeated the last word—her husband's name—with some firmness. Then she went to the bed, and leant against the foot in deep thought. Could we have seen her beautiful face, pale, but frequently flushing, and her features wrought upon by emotion that had its moments of relief, but was chiefly of pain, we should have pitied her. It may be that some superior intelligence witnessed her suffering and pitied her not, knowing that all she was to undergo was but the fiery trial destined for those for whom in the Evening there is Light.

"He loved her. He would have me know that he has loved before. This is the revelation made in return for my miserable secret. He would spare me all anger—all scenes, as he would call them, but he points my way, and shows that it must be another than his. At least he shall see that he has married a woman who needs not such a lesson twice. He used to praise my docility and quickness of learning—he shall have no cause to say that I have lost it."

She went down stairs, and rang with no faltering hand. The domestics were astonished to find in how short a time, and with what prompt words, they were discharged, paid to the last fraction, and dismissed from the house, by their usually gentle and soft-speaking mistress. Duke's nurse was retained for his sake, and the villa having been placed in charge of a trusted couple, to await Mr. Arundel's orders, Margaret, with a heart full to overflow, but which she proudly restrained from overflowing, saw the brass-bound wicket closed behind her. There was no thought then of the little house being called the Casket, or Pearl Villa, or Spencer Lodge, and, in another hour, she who had been its pearl was being borne, with her child and nurse, far away from the great city where she had found so much happiness and so much misery.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

SOME days later, Mr. Alban Cheriton was in conference with a lady patient, at his own residence.

"I know you hate me for coming here," she said, "but it is your own fault. Why do you not make my opiate stronger?"

"I might make it too strong," said Alban, "and then, you know, you would sleep for ever."

"So much the better."

"Don't talk in that profane manner," said Alban, in the calm tone habitual to him when he was uninterested in those he addressed; at which time he would utter any speech that occurred to him, and watch its effect as he would have watched the mingling of two chemical agents. "Besides, who knows that it would be so much the better? We are told that something which is by no means the better is in store for folks who lead unrighteous lives, and indulge their passions, and never go to church."

"Do you believe it?" asked the girl, wistfully.

"You do," said Alban, "and that is the point; because, as you know what is right, you are without excuse for neglecting it, and your look-out in the other world is very bad."

"If it is worse than my look-out in this one, it must be bad indeed," she replied, in a tone between carelessness and despondency. "But don't be unkind, don't torment me. It will soon be over, and then you will hear no more of Maria Prescott."

"I never heard of her before. What do you say Prescott for?"

"It is a very good name, isn't it?"

"It rhymes to flannel waistcoat, that's one good thing, because it may remind you to wrap up, as I am always ordering you to do. But what made you change? What was the matter with the name of Silverton?"

"Nothing; but mayn't a body change one's mind. And what's the use of a name, when one scarcely ever saw it on a cheque?"

"Ah."

"Wise man: knows everything when he's told. Now, just make me a very strong dose, if you please, that will give me one good long night's sleep, or else I shall think about changing my medical attendant, and then the world would be at an end, wouldn't it?"

"I can't and wont go on strengthening the medicine for you. If you would only be so good as to mind the rest of my prescriptions, you would not need opiates."

"What's the use of talking like that; you know quite well that I must go on as I am going on, and that I can no more pull up than you can light gunpowder and tell it to burn slowly."

"Who taught you that illustration—it is not so idiotic as feminine images usually are. Who gave it you?"

"You men don't understand us. You fancy we don't feel our

silliness, and sometimes try to pick up an idea when it is dropped by somebody we like. We don't get much gratitude for trying to be a little better than we are, and we get told that we are parrots, or that we learn things for a purpose."

"So you do, and for the same reason that you make your hair shiny and keep your hands white."

"Well, well, one can excuse *your* having a bad opinion of women, because a woman has treated you very badly, and the smart of it still lasts. How is she, by the way? She made a nice scene of it at the Opera."

"Maria," said Alban, imperiously, "I have requested you, more than once, to desist from any mention of that lady. I don't wish to be rude to you, but if you don't comply with a very reasonable request, you may seek medical aid somewhere else. I speak of this for the last time."

"Well, don't get solemn. I don't want to annoy you, and it is annoying to feel oneself thrown over. I have felt it myself."

"You," said Alban, in a tone into which he infused far more contempt than was either polite or Christianlike, seeing that in the first place he was addressing a woman, who is entitled to our best courtesy, and that in the second we are all equals, as miserable sinners, and have no right to scorn one another.

"Yes, me," returned the girl, quickly, and wounded. "I understand you. Proud, high, and honourable people, who never do a mean action, perhaps because they are never tempted to, they may have fine feelings and lacerated hearts; but people who can't talk French and Italian, and haven't been born with silver spoons in their mouths, they, of course, can't feel anything, and are to be laughed at if they show any sensibility. It's all right, of course, and it was meant to be so, and when the low class was made the feelings were left in them by some mistake."

"You are dreadfully profane to-day, Maria," said Alban, quietly.

"Don't sit mocking me," said the girl, passionately. "There was a day when you wouldn't have dared to do it."

"Was there?" asked Alban, rather amused. "Were you in training as a fighter in those days, or what?"

"There were people who cared for me, and wouldn't have seen me insulted," replied she. "But what's the good of talking about that? Please to give me my medicine, and let me go."

"With much pleasure, I assure you," said Alban.

The girl looked angrily at him, at this concluding speech, and then began to cough violently. He watched her through the first paroxysm, and signed that he would fetch her something. As he was leaving the room, Philip Arundel's voice was heard. Maria sprang up, and, amid her choking cough, made urgent appeal not to be compelled to meet him. Alban, who seemed equally desirous that she should not, would have managed a safe retreat for her, but in her excitement she disregarded his beckoning, and ran into a bed-room adjoining his only reception-room. The next moment Philip came in.

"Excuse my almost forcing my way up," said Arundel, "but mine case of necessity. I am in such a damned scrape."

"Mental, physical, pecuniary——"

"Not pecuniary, but I think every other put together."

"Never mind. All the black rabbits don't amount to that one black horse."

"I used to think so, but by Jove I would rather every bailiff in London were racing and dodging me. I'll tell you in two words."

"Not too loud," said Alban, "for the houses are built thin." That was not exactly what he meant. On second thoughts, he said, "Let us go and walk up and down in the square, I have been stifling here till I've got a headache."

"It is just coming on to rain like mad," said Philip, "and I've thin boots on. I won't keep you long."

There was no help for it, and Alban, reiterating his caution to Philip to speak low, was obliged to trust to fortune. To have pressed their going out would have seemed extraordinary, and it happened that he had no other room at his disposal.

"As a man of the world, you will hear what I am going to say without any nonsense, I know. I speak frankly to you, because I am sure of that," said Philip.

"A medical man has no prejudices, you know," said Alban.

"Well, it's an awkward thing to say to one of my wife's family, but it can't be helped. You know what men are when they are young, and how they get into entanglements which are the devil and all afterwards, and much more easy to get into than to get out of. Now, that happened to me, and long before I knew your cousin Margaret, there was something of that sort going on. I don't deny that it was rather a strong case, or that I was ass enough to let my feelings go a good way into it."

"Rather a mistake, I am told," said Alban.

"So it is, old fellow, and a devilish stupid mistake; but what's to be done? When old Nick drives we must all make the sparks fly, wheelers, leaders, and all. Once in harness, *he* keeps you up to the collar, I can tell you. Well, I was, or fancied that I was, very happy; and when I was away from the party, I was fool enough to write no end of letters, which the party, being no fool, took care to keep. By ——, one of 'em's turned up now—got into my wife's hands, by ——."

One person was hearing this who knew the fact perfectly well, and had been duly apprised that Mrs. Arundel had left her husband's house. But another person, with a hand on the handle of a bedroom door, was also hearing it, though she had opened so very little of the door that even Alban's eye did not detect the fact.

"But," said Alban, "though that is disagreeable enough, it is surely no such very great matter. I take it for granted that all communication between you and the person in question ceased before you married my cousin, and, equally of course, has never been renewed."

"Certainly, upon my honour," said Philip. "And, moreover, I did all that was proper in the way of provision and all that, so that there is not the shadow of an excuse for her annoying me—it is, in fact, infernally ungrateful and wicked in Maria."

Maria heard this, and also heard Mr. Cheriton reply—

"Women know nothing about gratitude. They will love you, if you like, and love you very well. But gratitude's above them."

"I believe you are right," said Philip. "I know that the allowance was regularly paid, and everything in the world done as arranged, and it only shows what a fool I was to care about a person who could turn out so bad, and try to injure me at home."

"But the letter can't have done that," said Alban. "My cousin has too much sense."

"I'll tell you what she has done, then. She has left the house, and gone off with the child, I don't know where, and all that she has done is to enclose me the letter, by way of showing me that she has received it. Look—here it is. And here's an envelope, directed to me in her own hand."

"And posted——"

"Why, that would be no clue; because if she wished to be concealed, she would naturally get it posted in some town in the North, or Wales, or anywhere, to throw one off the scent. But this was posted at the railway, London Bridge."

"She is gone to Hastings," said Alban.

"How should you know?"

"I advised her to go there. You asked me to call and see the boy. I did; and saw that he wanted sea air. So I named Hastings."

"She would remember that, and go to Scarborough or Aberystwith."

"I tell you, no. I prescribed Hastings for the child, and you know best whether she would run any risk with *him*. Besides, I see no proof that she wants to be concealed. Indeed, I see no proof of any anger or ill-feeling. The letter has got into her hands, and she must take some notice of it. The most delicate way was to return it to you, without a word."

"I can't blame you, my dear fellow, for seeing your cousin's conduct in the best light; but I know her better than you do, as is natural. Have I told you that she had discharged the servants, and given the house to an old woman to take care of?"

"No. That looks determined, certainly. I do not defend that step; it was one that no wife ought to take without her husband's authority. You see, I am just, though I am poor Margaret's cousin. But for this, I should have said that either there was no quarrel at all, or that she had just, woman-like, gone away, to give you the pleasure of going after her, making some little acknowledgment, receiving pardon, and bringing her back again."

"Pardon," said Philip. "Nonsense apart, Alban, pardon for what? It is something new for a woman to take upon herself to ask what a man did before marriage, and certainly when she has done him the honour of marrying him, such inquiries are as useless as they are ridiculous and impertinent. If I lived in the *Agapemone* before I was married, what's that to her? I have come out, and I don't go back again, and that is all she has to care about. Do you know, that I consider myself both insulted and ill-treated?"

"I will, of course, refrain from adopting your expressions, my dear Philip," said Alban, with sadness; "but I am bound to admit that my cousin has taken a step which I regret now, and which she will live





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to regret. At the same time, I think for the sake of your own family—ours has no claim on you—and for the sake of your child, you will do well to leave a door of reconciliation ajar.”

Another door was ajar behind the speaker; but he had risen to speak to the impetuous Philip, and therefore was unaware that they were being seen as well as heard.

“I shall not act hastily, or otherwise than as becomes a gentleman,” said Philip, “and there are circumstances—at least there have been circumstances” (he hardly knew how to explain that he had been for a long time treating his wife with neglect, coldness, and a species of tyranny none the more bearable for being polished and unimpeachable) “which may, or which might, to a certain extent, make a temporary alienation, without scandal, of course, not altogether irrational. But Margaret has taken the thing into her own hands, and I am not a person who chooses to be dictated to in my family affairs. The business is a very awkward one—very.”

Alban, although he sat in mortal fear lest the ears of the person in the bed-room should be preternaturally opened, owned to a sensation of triumph as he found that the seed which he had from time to time sown had brought forth fruit, and that the harvest was likely to be so promising. And as Philip, irritated by events, yet checked and pulled by the consciousness that nearly everything he had to complain of was his own causing, went round and round the bush, and evidently did not know what to do; Alban judged it the time

“When wisdom throws  
The golden bridge she builds for flying foes.”

“*Certus amicus in re incertâ cernitur*,” he said.

“That is true,” said Philip, “and, to tell you the truth——”

“You relied on my acting for you to the best of my ability. I thank you for your confidence,” said Alban, just touching his friend’s arm for a moment. “The chief difficulty, as far as I am concerned, is, you know, in the fact that Mrs. Arundel is my relative, and that any course I may advise may seem—I won’t say to you, who know me, but to your friends—as dictated by my regard for her. It is that feeling which would make me recommend you to ask some other friend to act on your behalf, and do you let me see to my cousin’s interests.”

“It will be a new thing for my friends to interfere in my affairs,” said Philip. “I ask you to represent me, and I shall be quite sure that I get fair play.”

“Well, then,” said Alban Cheriton, “so be it, and I will endeavour to be just to both parties. I know pretty well what is in your mind, when you allude to circumstances. I may say to you that I honour you much for your manliness and frankness in admitting that you have been in some degree to blame, and I am sorry that my cousin does not appear to have quite understood a nature like yours. I know what your life has been pretty well, and I do not see that she has much to complain about, certainly nothing to justify her availing herself of the first pretext to break up your household and leave your protection. Margaret has so entirely put herself in the wrong, that

I think the first overtures cannot proceed from you, if you are hereafter to be re-united, and you are to be the head of the household."

"Decidedly not," said Philip. "I am, and have a right to be, offended past forgiveness. The only thing is, that in taking a hasty step, she does not know what inconveniences she may be encountering. I do not even know what money she may have—not too much, I fear."

"Her friend and counsellor, Mr. Keckling, will have seen to that," said Alban, in no way pleased with evidence that Philip Arundel in his heart regarded Margaret with tenderness and respect, and really attached no grave character to her going away. A thought that Philip's own honour was in the faintest danger from his wife's abandoning him, were it for an age, never dared to intrude. He was, as he said, offended and angry, but he did Margaret too much justice to feel the slightest apprehension.

"Keckling! Ah," said Arundel, incensed anew at the mention of the Russian merchant; "he meddles too much in my family affairs."

"That I take to be no new discovery."

"No; we have spoken of it before. If I thought that he was advising my wife in her present course——"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Have you not? Then he is an old hypocrite, for he is at this time professing the utmost friendliness, and has undertaken to do something which would be a great service to me."

"I think he is a hypocrite; but hypocrites, who have a character to keep up, often do one better service than honest men. Is this particular service a secret?"

Philip was posed. It was a delicate question whether he ought to speak to Alban upon the subject of his cousin's unfortunate pedigree. If Alban had been aware of the circumstances, there was a certain suggestion of something more than unfriendliness in Philip's having been kept in the dark. If Mr. Cheriton, on the other hand, were ignorant of the history of Margaret's father and mother, it was needless to enlighten him.

He would have spared himself all such mental discussion, and some other trouble, had he been apprised of this, namely:—

That Mr. Keckling would have known nothing of Margaret's story, and that the experimental narrative by which he ascertained Margaret's sentiments, would by consequence never have been told, but for a well-conceived device of Alban Cheriton's.

On the other hand, Alban had not been aware that the Arundels had met at Keckling's, and it did not occur to him that the service in question had aught to do with the skeleton in the family.

"It is a secret," said Alban, after a pause, "and therefore let us pass on. I think that my course is to find Mrs. Arundel——"

"I beg your pardon, one moment," said Philip.

Philip's conscience was as yet by no means seared with a red-hot iron. He felt in his heart of hearts that he had done much, as has been said, to bring on the separation which had been thus suddenly accomplished. He could not conceal from himself that there would be

a great many points to be urged in Margaret's favour. But though sufficiently clear-sighted to see this, he had not self-command enough to act upon his convictions, and to take, as he ought to have done, the initiative—that is (to drop polysyllabic slang) to go after his wife, own his errors, and—dear old English household phrase—"make it up." Philip's character lacked the earnestness that would, under similar circumstances, have sped Alban on such a course. He rather chose to heap up defences for himself, to show that Margaret was under such deep obligation to him and his, that her conduct was utterly inexcusable. It was folly in him, and follies are usually more severely punished in this world than vices.

"I interrupted you," said Philip, "because you ought quite to understand how Margaret has been treated in our family, and therefore how little justification there is for her sudden and harsh behaviour."

"I have not to learn, my dear Arundel, that my cousin has been appreciated as she deserves to be," said Alban.

"There is something more than appreciation," said Arundel. "I mention the subject with reluctance, and I do not know how far you are acquainted with it. Mrs. Arundel's father—"

Alban laid his hand on Philip's arm.

"You need not say much more. I have always been prepared to hear you name that person, and another. Evidently, it was not for me to bring up the subject."

"You are right. Well, the discovery was made."

Alban Cheriton felt that his eyes must be bright with the consciousness of success, and with the certainty of a final triumph, and he would not raise them to the face of Arundel. Cheriton now saw how to deliver his blow.

"Pardon me, this time," he said, "but the words you have chosen are scarcely those which should describe the case. My cousin may have been wrong in her last act, but I cannot hear duplicity imputed to her, even accidentally. There was no discovery. There was an explanation."

"I don't quite see what you are driving at," said Philip.

"It was," said Alban, almost sternly, "a great honour and distinction for the child of the dissenting doctor's family, the niece of the lodging-house keeper, to marry into the house of Arundel. We all are grateful for the honour; I do not speak in mockery. But not into the house of Arundel, or into the house of Brunswick, would a member of our family marry at the price of a lie."

"Who talks of lies?"

"Before I can take any step in your affairs, Philip, I must call on you to withdraw the word discovery, and admit in the fullest manner that before Margaret accepted your proposal of marriage she explained to you, or caused to be explained to you, the terrible stain and blot upon her pedigree."

"Alban," cried Philip, white with passion.

"You must make this declaration, I repeat," said Alban, in a low determined voice. "I will not wrong you by the thought that you could avail yourself of the miserable story to make this separation a

permanent one. That course has been effectually barred by the frankness with which Margaret revealed the truth before your marriage."

"And as I stand here, and as a man and a gentleman, and before God," said Philip, hardly able to speak, "I heard the story for the first time within the last month."

"We can never speak again, Mr. Arundel," said Alban, in a tone of grave sorrow. "Family considerations will, I hope, prevent our being active enemies, but we are henceforth strangers. I need hardly add that you have put it out of my power to interfere in this painful business, except as my cousin's agent, and in conference with some third person."

But Philip's nature, not deep, but not false, was now too much stirred to allow him to notice harsh words. He was staggered, almost stunned, and there was something piteous in his tone as he replied, with a deprecating gesture—

"A word, a word, Alban Cheriton, if we never speak again until the day of judgment! Answer me, and then quarrel as you will. Did Margaret know her father and mother's history—answer me, I say, point-blank, and in a word—before her marriage? Answer me as man to man."

"Are you mad? Did Margaret know why she was sent home from India? Did Margaret know why she was kept in an obscure country town, where, because her story was known, even her rare beauty could not procure her a husband among the prejudiced and narrow-minded provincials? Did Margaret know, living with her father's sister, Mrs. Spencer? You talk too wildly, sir, and too evidently in earnest, for me to accuse you, again, of intentional insult, but you utterly bewilder me by your speeches."

"It was—it was matter of family talk among you, then?" stammered Philip.

"No," said Alban. "Ours is a household where subjects of pain and sin are not made family talk, but never were the miserable Spencers forgotten in family prayer."

Philip Arundel uttered an oath we record not, and covered his face with his hands.

It was the other man who should have done so. But he watched the working of the poison with less remorse than he would have felt in seeing some wretched animal writhe in the torments of an experiment. His triumphant enemy, the superb Arundel, the butterfly lover who had won from him the treasure of his heart, the man for whom Margaret had rejected and insulted him, the man who would have rendered his life a blank had he not stirred his heart to hate and action—there he sat, abandoned by his wife, and as he believed, deceived by her. Half his vengeance was accomplished.

As Philip sat in silence, Alban summoned up the scene on Ryde pier. It was nearly balanced, he thought.

Philip rose, deadly pale.

"Take no step in relation to your cousin until you hear from me again," he said, in a low voice.

"I can give no pledge," replied Alban, coldly.

"I am her husband, sir, remember that," said Philip, his colour returning, and his eye flashing angrily. But he was met by a look as proud as his own, and with a calm eye. Alban suppressed the retort that arose to his tongue, and said, with mildness—

"Nothing, I hope, will be forgotten by me which I ought to remember."

Philip Arundel went hastily out.

Alban Cheriton sat down in his large chair, and gazed intently upon the skull that lay on his table, not seeing it, however, for a moment. There was no smile of triumph, no vulgar manifestation of pleasure. But he sat very still—quite still.

Suddenly he sprang up, recollecting what he has forgotten during the exciting interview that had passed. He hurried to the door of the adjacent room, and opening it, found Maria asleep on his bed.

"The coast is clear," he cried.

The girl roused herself, and said, repiningly—

"You might have let me have my sleep out, knowing how little I get."

"Sleep at night," said Alban. "It is not well to do so in the day-time."

"All your fault," said Maria, at the looking-glass. "Why did you not get rid of him sooner? I looked at all your books, which are rubbish, and then I thought I would lie down, and so I went off. Now I shan't have another wink for twenty-four hours."

"I am very sorry," said Alban.

"Not you. What did he want. Strychnine?"

"What should he want strychnine for?"

"I don't know; but it's chiefly sold to married men, I hear."

"Well, I didn't sell him any strychnine," said Alban, compressing his lips, a gesture which was not lost upon the girl at the mirror. She then instinctively smoothed the bed, and followed Alban into the sitting-room.

"Please give me my medicine," she said.

"Certainly," said Alban, with more kindness than he had before shown. "I will go down and mix it."

His back was scarcely turned when she darted at the letter from Philip to herself, almost as she had darted at it when it first came to gladden her in her little suburban home. In the course of the conversation Philip had laid it on the well-littered table, and Cheriton had not seen it. It was again in the possession of Philip's "dear little Maria." She was about to put it into her pocket, when a second thought struck her—she sprang upon a chair, seized an old and uninviting-looking book from a high shelf, put the letter between the leaves, and replaced the volume, the title of which, with sundry grimaces, she mastered sufficiently to recollect it. When Alban returned with the medicine, she was looking out at the window.

"By the green shade of my old blind father," she said, "it has been raining like no end."

"Where's the brougham?" said Alban.

"It's no case of Brougham now, but of *Walks*," responded the girl, flippantly. "Now, is this stuff strong?"

"Stronger than it ought to be."

"Well, I'm weaker than I ought to be, so we're quits."

Maria made a parade of putting away the bottle carefully, and departed. But she had not got very far from the house, when she took the phial from her pocket, deliberately poured its contents into the kennel, and to the astonishment of a small boy, presented him with the bottle.

"I think," she said to herself, "that he did believe I had been asleep, but perhaps he did not; and if he thought that I had listened that man would as quietly have sent me off with a bottle full of something to finish me, as I gave the empty one to that brat. A wise thing to get rid of it, too, Miss Maria, or you might be tempted to get up some dark night, and quietly walk straight out of this evil world. And yet I don't know that it was wise, either. Nobody would miss me, and I dare say they would bury me by my poor little Willy. I am sorry I threw it away, now."

But the unfortunate, half-taught, purposeless, cheerless Creature for once wronged Alban. His mind had been so occupied by his own objects that he had no thought to spare for her, after the first five minutes of the interview, and he accepted without challenge the idea presented to him on entering the bedroom. He thought she had been asleep. Nor had she any right, beyond that given her by her own fantastic imagination, to suppose that Alban would have put her out of the way. You may not approve of his course in reference to his cousin and her husband, but there was a love affair, and all is fair in love, as we have been taught, in childhood, from time immemorial. The devil may be as black as he is painted, but there is no propriety in painting him blacker.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### VIRGINIUS AND VIRGINIA.

ALBAN CHERITON was perfectly right in surmising that Mrs. Arundel had gone to Hastings. It was the place which he had suggested as likely to be most beneficial to her child, and in the agitation of her departure she was only too glad to have one fixed idea as to her destination. She had enough to think of without reviewing the merits of the various retreats offered to the railway traveller; and willingly did she avail herself of this facile means of transit, which catches up the metropolitan from amid the bustle, and whirl, and roar of the great city, and with a scream and a rush sets him down in a solitary and silent nook by the sea.

It occurs to me that the admiring references made by writers of our day to our means of locomotion, may read (if we are lucky enough to be read at all) as the expression of a sort of childlike wonder and satisfaction. But future ages will be good enough, let us hope, to verify dates, and to notice that men who live in this present Donati Comet year have gone through the transition state of



travel, have, in their youth, endured or enjoyed the old crawling and uncertain coach, and are revelling in the pleasure of first-class carriages and fifty miles an hour with the zest of a man who has been poor until middle life, and then comes into affluence. Our children, who first saw fresh fields and pastures new through the plate-glass of the corner of the railway carriage, will have none of this feeling; and if they write books—which Providence in its mercy prevent as far as may be—they will never emit any of these little gushings of gratitude for the iron roads. Besides, for aught that I or the British Association know, my grandsons may pay a fly-tax on their wings.

Margaret's sensations during her brief journey were not so complicated as she expected them to be. During that time, whatever may have been the case afterwards, one mastering feeling overrode all else. The gentle spirit had been fairly roused by ungentle injustice, and wounded pride forbade the access of regret, hope, or despondency. The wife simply felt that she had received at the hands of her husband deadly insult and wrong, and until she could show that she could at once accept and resent his message, as she interpreted it to be, she had no power to bring herself to anything like a calm survey of her position. Her desire was to hurry from London, and even the speed with which she was borne along failed to keep pace with her impatience. Fatal, indeed, was the bias given to her thoughts by the words of her friend Lady M'Cullombich. Philip had loved, passionately loved, before he met Margaret—that she learned from the terrible letter she had found. Philip closed a long course of neglect, coldness, and estrangement by deliberately bringing to her notice the fact that he had loved another—that poison thought was infused by the friend whose counsel she had sought in the hour of her trial. Add, that the time he had chosen to strike the blow was when she was all humble thankfulness at having escaped humiliation, when her heart was full of gratitude and kindness to him and his, and she felt that her life's devotion was consecrated anew to his happiness. The storm-clouds had parted, the blue and hopeful sky was visible, and as she looked up in joy the bolt had been launched, and by whose hand? In language which was familiar to her, it may be said that "she did well to be angry."

The terminus was reached, porters raced for the carriage handles, and in another instant the bustle of an arriving train was busy on the platform. Unused to travel alone, Margaret looked out in some bewilderment, when the door was opened, and little Duke, who was near it, and had been quite astonished and almost cowed during the journey by the unusual coldness and silence of his mother, was lifted out by a gentleman, who, holding the startled child on his arm, tendered his hand to assist Margaret from the carriage.

An elderly, but still young-looking man, tall, and of ready and gentlemanly address, received her, and in a kindly voice, begged her to be careful how she stepped out. Margaret had seen the face once before in England, many times, but many years before, in India. At another moment she might have doubted the identity of the stranger, but there are times when the faculties are preternaturally sharpened

and concentrated. She had not an instant's doubt upon the subject now, and she placed her hand in that of her father.

"I would not get into the same carriage with you, my dear," he said, in the continuous tone he might have used if he had accompanied her to the London terminus, "for I knew that with a child it is pleasanter for a lady to have the place to herself, but I took care that no one else should be put in. Nurse, take care of the boy while I see to the luggage. Will you walk, my dear, or have a fly?"

This commonplace matter-of-fact resumption of acquaintance would have seemed strange to Margaret at another time, and it would also have been a question with her whether she was to allow her father to become her companion. But though she had instantly recognised him, and at the same moment recognised the complication of troubles which his presence might bring, her energies refused to come to her aid. She calmly, and with a kind of unconscious indifference, accepted his services and awaited his directions.

"There are your boxes, my dear, and there is nurse's," he said, having, with the tact of an old traveller, indicated them, and got them rapidly separated by a porter (with the aid of a slight fee), while bustling men were bawling, and fast men were swearing, and old women were clamouring at their baggage, with far smaller effect.

"Are you going to an hotel, or to lodgings?"

Margaret handed him the address which had been sent her by Alban.

"Horley Crescent—I know it—an excellent situation, airy, but protected." And in a few minutes the party were in a fly, and *en route* for the cliff.

Duke's grandfather found quite enough to occupy him in talking to his grandchild, and in making friends with him, not forgetting a word or two calculated to please his nurse, to have occasion to trouble Margaret to say much. But when they were installed in the excellent lodgings where they were duly expected and provided for, and nurse had withdrawn with the child, Mr. Armandale Spencer approached his daughter, embraced her slightly, touched her forehead with a light kiss, and having acquitted himself of these preliminaries, said, in a pleasant way,

"Now, my dear child, we will quite understand one another, and after that there will be need of very little talk between us which all the world may not hear. First let me say that you have grown into the beautiful creature I always prophesied you would be, and that I am exceedingly proud of you. As for Duke, he is a little angel. I can't help saying this, though it is not exactly business."

Margaret was not displeased—that was all.

"To come to myself. You have heard a great deal about me, especially of late, which it must have been very unpleasant to you to hear. I may as well say to you, for your private satisfaction, that much that is said against me is utterly false, and the rest is exaggerated. I am pleased to see that hopeful look, my dear, but as we are now talking business, I am bound to add that much that is said to my discredit I have no means of refuting, and therefore you may consider it as true—such being the way of the world."





"But not of a daughter," said Margaret, gravely.

"My dear daughter, that sentiment is worthy of you, and of those who have taken so much pains to make you what you are. I quite recognise its sweetness and kindness. But I am sorry to say that I must be completely understood. The rules of society, as they are called in England, proscribe the man who violates them, and that fault it has been my misfortune to commit upon certain occasions. In a word, my dear, please to take it for granted, however disagreeable it is for me to say it, and you to hear it, that I am not what is called a Respectable man. I would not force this fact upon you, but that it is absolutely necessary that you should be fully possessed of it."

His child could only look, and listen.

"Further, my dear, it is well for me to mention that some of your friends are not only perfectly aware of this unpleasant fact, but are in consequence inclined to adopt a line of action against which I am, reluctantly, compelled to defend myself."

"I know nothing, sir, of——"

"My dear, you need not tell me that. You, if a free agent, would be all that is dutiful and affectionate, remembering that in the commandment you are told to honour your father, without any condition as to whether he deserves to be honoured or not. But you are not a free agent, nor am I unreasonable enough to expect you to act as one—indeed I do not desire it. At present, at all events, I wish you to know, and do not ask you to act."

This intimation was somewhat satisfactory to Margaret, and put her, as it was designed to do, more at her ease.

"In the first place, my dear girl," said Armandale, in his agreeable manner, "the friends I allude to are kind enough to establish a very careful watch upon my goings out and comings in. I have lived too long where that kind of thing is habitual not to detect the system when it is put into operation, especially when it is done so clumsily as by your Russian friend, Mr. Keckling."

"Mr. Keckling set spies on you, sir!" exclaimed Margaret. "It is impossible!"

"It is, nevertheless, perfectly true, my dear; and I am making no complaint about it. In the East the thing is perfectly understood, and we receive a spy with complete politeness until he has been spied upon in his turn, and then, if it be worth while, a cup of coffee, properly made, saves him and us further trouble. But even if that sort of self-defence were practicable here, it would not be desirable. Mr. Keckling's spying is very harmless in itself, and he learns nothing but what, if he would write me a list of questions, he should know from myself, day by day. A blundering old tradesman from Russia is no match for a gentleman who has worn a turban."

"I assure you, sir, that you do not know Mr. Keckling."

"Not so well as I intend to know him, my love, but quite well enough to make no mistake in what I am saying. But I repeat that I have no complaint, and if I had one, I should not trouble you with it at a time when you have trouble enough upon your hands."

Margaret looked up in surprise.

"Do you wonder at my knowing that. Is it not my duty to know all that I can about you, and to do all I can for you?"

That it was something late for her father to make this discovery may have occurred to Margaret, but she was too good to have said it, even had she been in spirits to do so.

"I have made it my business to ascertain what it was necessary for me to be acquainted with, but I have not gone about my work in the style of our friend from Russia. I know, my dear, that you have had differences with your husband, about which I shall say nothing; and I am aware, also, that you have dismissed your servants, and, in high displeasure with Mr. Arundel, have come to the sea-side. I have felt it my duty to take care that you did not suffer by that slightly precipitate step."

"You have, sir?"

"My dear, I don't want to touch upon painful topics, but this is not the first time that a member of my family has run away from her husband's house—don't turn so very red, my dear—circumstances are entirely different in all but the running away."

"I did not think of that," said Margaret, indignantly. "I thought—but never mind."

"You thought, and again your sentiments do you honour, that I was a little unfeeling in making reference to a certain domestic incident. You would be right, but for the necessity I had of being fully comprehended. Let me go on to say, therefore, that I am naturally sensitive when anything of the sort happens, and it appeared to me that I could not act in a kinder manner, or more as became me, than by enabling you to say, my dear, in the event of your leaving your home being censured, that you had your father's escort, and that your father was with you during your absence from your husband's roof."

Mrs. Arundel's charming face had perhaps seldom been seen to less advantage, for the variety of considerations thus suddenly urged upon her united to give her a bewildered look, of no pleasant character. A certain terror also came upon her for a moment—a woman's feeling that after all men were of stronger nature than her own, and that a contest with her destiny would be hopeless. But she rallied, and said, with some spirit—

"I am not afraid of any act of mine being misinterpreted by those whose opinion I value."

"The speech of an innocent child, my dear. But you must remember that you are the mother of an innocent child, and that for his sake it is your duty to be guarded. You know best whether you may not yourself have suffered from want of a similar thoughtfulness elsewhere."

The speech told, and Margaret broke into tears.

"It is lamentable to me that tears should mark our first interview, my dear Margaret, but we will hope that it will be for the last as well as the first time that they will fall. I have now told you nearly all that I had to say, and you will be glad to be alone after your journey. I shall not intrude upon you again to-day, I think, but in the morning we shall meet. I trust that darling Duke will not have been fatigued by his journey."

Armandale Spencer left the room, laying a gentle hand on his daughter's head as he went out. His first business was to secure apartments for himself in the same house. This he managed, and his reason for taking a separate sitting-room, namely, that having important business to attend to daily, he could not always be with his darlings, as he called Margaret and Marmaduke, was favourably received by the smiling landlady, who found the caddies of elderly gentlemen much easier plunder than those of young matrons.

Then did Armandale stroll down to the telegraph station, and dispatch a message (repeated) to London. Later in the day he wrote his daughter a kind little note, begging her not to agitate her mind with any feelings of apprehension as to the step she had taken in leaving town, for that he had adopted every precaution to prevent a whisper of scandal, having sent up a message of which he enclosed her a copy.

*From Armandale Spencer, of Hastings, to Marmaduke Arundel,  
Esq., M.P., Thanington-square, London.*

*My dear Sir,*

*My daughter, Mrs. Philip Arundel, left town this morning, by the noon train, with me, and is residing with me at No. 11, Horley-crescent, Hastings.*

Margaret's position seemed destined to become more and more embarrassing every hour. Of course, had Armandale Spencer been that which he took such pains to impress upon her that he was not, namely, a respectable man, nothing could be more desirable than the care which he thus claimed to exercise over his child. But, unhappily, the melancholy revelation made to her by Mr. Keckling, the conclave in which the Arundels met that gentleman to debate how to be freed from Armandale's presence, and, lastly, her father's own admission that he was a rogue, transformed parental attention into mischievous if not malicious plotting. She had left her husband's house, it was true, but this was under circumstances in which she held herself to be entirely in the right, though the step was a grave and important one. But she had hardly left her home when she found herself in the charge of one whom her husband and his friends regarded with hatred and contempt, and who took instant opportunity to apprise her husband and his friends that she was with him. I would not willingly detract from the heroism of my heroine, but if everybody had their due, I am afraid I should have to set down that in the increasing complication and distress of her position, Margaret wished at times (and she was but a girl, poor thing) that she were again in her own bedroom, at the moment Lady M'Cullombich had departed. It may be that the servants would not have been discharged, nor the boxes packed.

But there was the situation, and if she was woman enough to feel alarmed, she was also woman enough to be true to herself. She resolved to separate herself from her unworthy father, if possible without violence or reproach, and to establish herself (for his words, coarse as they were, had made her think, and feel that there was

truth in what he had said) where witnesses to her daily life should never be wanting. Her husband had cast her out, and it might be that they would meet no more on earth, but no hour of their separation should remain unaccounted for, even though that account lasted until her life was summed up in the book by which we shall all be judged.

It was not surprising that she preferred writing to her father to encountering him in person. She addressed him in a respectful letter, in which she urged the claims and duties of her position as a wife, and asked of him, in proof of the affection which she was willing to believe he felt for her, that he would not further embarrass her, and injure the interests of his helpless grandchild, by insisting on being her companion. In any way that she could promote his welfare, she added, she should feel it a duty and a privilege to do so, but she begged, for all their sakes, that, for the present at least, he would retire, if not from the town, from the house.

Still less surprising was it that poor Margaret, in a situation of doubt and difficulty such as she had never before known, should once more have recourse to her old and dear friend, the Russian merchant. A brief letter to Mr. Keckling, merely informing him where she was, and begging him, with the most earnest apology for asking it, to come down and see her, was her next composition.

She had known little of her father, and had lived nearly all her life with honest and honourable people, and therefore it did not occur to her to do the next thing which she ought to have done.

Nor will it surprise anybody to be told that when the house-servant, who had been summoned by Mrs. Arundel's bell to deliver one letter to Armandale Spencer, Esq., and to take the other to the post, went into the room of the gentleman for the first mentioned purpose, he, who had been on the watch, hoped, in a very natural manner, that his daughter had not forgotten to write another letter, and the girl as naturally mentioned that she had one for the post. Mr. Spencer instantly said that he would take it, which pleased the domestic; and he proceeded to please her still further by giving her half-a-crown, and desiring her to say, if asked, that she herself had put it into the box at five o'clock. For less than that sum the poor maiden would have told a lie of much darker complexion. Mr. Armandale Spencer therefore obtained the letter, and as on reading it he saw nothing in it which made him deem it necessary to trouble Mr. Keckling therewith, he locked it up in his own neat despatch-box, it being a way of his to keep all letters. The man who habitually does so is either a not very wise, or a not very good man.

The father wrote no answer to his daughter, but sending for her nurse, told her to give his best love to Mrs. Arundel, and say that what she desired should be attended to; and he managed to be unwell next day, so that he could not leave his sitting-room. It was sad for Margaret that she could not visit and attend upon him, but she would have spared her trouble had she looked in and seen him calmly smoking over a vile French novel (pardon the tautology) and enjoying its vileness. He, too, had written letters to London, and he was awaiting their effect. In their case, of course, the little operation of



posting had not been forgotten, it being a way of his to post all letters with his own hand. The man who habitually does so is certainly a wise, and possibly a good man.

And there, for the moment, we will leave our Margaret, in order to return to town, where others are occupied not irrespectively of her interests. For herself, poor girl, there was little peace or rest. Her pride had been wounded, her heart had been almost crushed, and to add to these miseries, she had been innocently brought into a position that must give mortal offence to those who had treated her so well. And when post after post arrived, and there was no letter from Mr. Keckling, who had ever shown himself so tenderly careful and loving, she began to feel new alarm. Had she done a wrong in leaving her home, and was there to be added to all her sorrows the sense of shame and error? Poor dear Margaret—let us not needlessly intrude upon her misery.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### NEWS SPREADS.

PHILIP ARUNDEL left the residence of Alban with a fiercer battle raging in his bosom than had ever raged in that ordinarily tranquil dominion. He had entered the house wounded and annoyed, as he had said, but perhaps a little ashamed of himself, and he had certainly, as he now unhesitatingly owned to himself, hoped that Alban would have volunteered to arrange matters and restore Margaret to his arms. It had pleased him in prosperous times to sport lightly with the happiness in his possession, and he had assuredly never done full justice to Margaret's character. But now that she had withdrawn from him, and he had leisure to recollect, and motive to sound his own heart, he began to discover something of the real value of the treasure he had treated so carelessly. And though it was not in him to clear himself of the conventionalities of the world, and to rush earnestly after that which was so well worth saving, he had a well-grounded hope that things would be made all right again, and he mentally vowed that he would, when Margaret and he were once more united, become another kind of husband. The old idea of his having condescended in marrying her, and the yet more unworthy idea that he was as good a husband as most men made, and as most women had a right to expect, were becoming very faint and mean to his eyes, and he was awakening to the conviction that he had acted foolishly and unkindly to a good and beautiful wife.

As for her last step, that of going away, it was by no means the thing, of course; but then it showed the strong affection she must have entertained for him when she could not bear even to hear that he had rather liked a mistress of other days. Was not jealousy flattering to a man? People said so, especially feminine people, and though his high-bred creed had told him that such a passion was low

and vulgar, and only fit for women who could tear one another's caps and scratch, there might be exceptions ; and if such a thorough lady as Margaret could be jealous, the man who made her so ought to be very proud. He could not be greatly offended at her earnest way of showing how much she cared for him, and though it was bad taste for a woman to get herself talked about, he would excuse it this time, and he was quite sure she would never do it again. In fact, Philip was working himself round, in rather a shallow manner, to an immediate reconciliation, and was prepared to try and be a better boy.

When, as has been seen, he showed his enemy the way to smite, and the blow was given.

He rushed from the house, utterly regardless of the proprieties, and at a pace which nothing in ordinary times could have induced him to adopt ; and he went on at this fierce rate, and without any definite purpose, until he found himself on the heath to the north of London. He did not know that he had been going thither, but he found rising ground opposing him, and there was something in the struggle with the hill that was not disagreeable to his exasperated feelings. For he was now stung to the very quick.

And now, I imagine, we may answer the question asked long ago. Had he loved Margaret ? We may unhesitatingly answer—no. For his feeling now was exasperation. Had he loved—it had been sorrow.

Deceived, deluded, blinded by a girl who had lived all her life in the country, and in her first London season had the art to entrap into marriage a gentleman, a man of the world, a professed sceptic as to most things, and supposing himself specially gifted with the power of seeing other people's games. That was something, that was much ; but, to his credit, that was not all, or even the main crime on Margaret's part.

She had been so candid, so pure, so frank. Her whole heart had been given up to him ; his words were her lessons, his kisses her reward, his embrace her happiness. He had believed in her, he who had tried to think that he believed in no woman, and that woman was by reason of her weakness and vanity an irresponsible person, and therefore not to be trusted. Margaret had neither weakness nor vanity beyond what was graceful and becoming to woman ; and he would have trusted her, he owned to himself in the hour of his bitterness, trusted her with his whole heart. And she had dared to be a fraud, a cheat, had dared to buy up his affections with her false coin, had dared to be cunning and treacherous, and to keep in her bosom a cursed secret while that bosom reclined against his own, and those innocent-looking eyes gazed up to his.

Yes, it demanded all the indisputable proof received that day, to make him believe anything against Margaret, while that last image was present to her husband's mind. But the proof was indisputable—irrefragable.

And though good angels are often out of the way when they are wanted (a fact that might seem to demand explanation), bad devils are much more attentive to their business. When were they wanting, if they could be useful ? There was one ready on Hampstead Heath, with a suggestion at the proper time. As Philip's thoughts

hurried on to this point, there was the right devil in the right place, to hint that Margaret had suspected, perhaps discovered; that her husband was aware of her duplicity, and had availed herself of the excuse for leaving him afforded by the letter. To be sure, it was so. On reflection, Margaret was not a foolish girl—she knew the duties of a wife, and a wife's position and privileges. It was not jealousy. She would not have thrown all her advantages and happiness away for the sake of a past intrigue—very few women were fools enough to do so even when the affair was a present one—no. Mrs. Arundel had been mixed up in the discussion at Keckling's; she had got a hint that her part could not be concealed—she had gone sooner than face Philip. She was coward as well as traitress.

"What a cursed fool I was to marry!" was the exclamation sent up from earth to heaven by the maddened Philip. The remark is supposed to have been made by other men in their time; but it has seldom been uttered with more intensity of expression.

Now have I a mind to risk a humiliatingly coarse illustration of a meaning I would convey. A vulgar image—a commonplace image—everything that is out of art, and beneath the dignity of a writer with self-respect and self-command—yet I will write it.

Many were the asses grazing on that heath; but not one of them, nor all of them put together, could so completely typify the Representative Ass, as did Philip Arundel.

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"How white you look, Philip," said John Claxton. "Deuced bad; whiter than any married man has a right to look. Sit down over there, and be blowed up. The old story, of course. You never come near me; but I hear of you, reprobate and Antinomian. Will you beer? No, better not. I'll give you some Cognac, that will send a little colour into your cheeks."

"Yes, give me that," said Philip Arundel, in a tone that made his friend suspend his hospitalities and look at him earnestly.

"You *are* ill, my boy," said Claxton, coming up to him. "That's not Evans's, and that sort of thing. You are all in a shake."

"Give me the brandy, Jack. It can't hurt me. Nothing can hurt me."

"Don't begin that d—d dismal rubbish, my dear fellow, or I will take you round to my doctor's in five minutes. There, by all means take the stuff, and behave yourself."

Philip took the glass, and put it to his lips; but at the moment it touched them, nature gave a shudder,—he set down the liquor, and laying his head on the table, began to sob violently.

"By Jove," said Claxton, "something has happened, and you have not come here for nothing. Here, Clarke, Clarke," he cried to his clerk, who was entering, but was stopped by Claxton, who did not wish him to see Philip's agitation. "Let nobody in on any pretence whatever."

"Mr. Ganarew was to call at two——"

"I'm gone to a consultation at Westminster—let no one in, I tell you," and he closed the double doors, and bolted them. Then he approached Philip very kindly, and desired him not to try to talk.

"I must talk. I came to talk to you, old fellow. I wish I had talked to you a good deal more," said Arundel, mastering himself as best he could. "There's nothing like an old friend, after all."

"And it's after all that some folks come to an old friend, Philip, which is not very flattering to him. But I don't mean you, though I wish I had seen a little more of you."

Philip Arundel then confided his whole story to Claxton, and, so far as he knew, as truthfully as it has been set before the reader.

Claxton was more grieved than surprised at the estrangement between Margaret and Philip, though he did not tell the latter so; and when Arundel had narrated the circumstances of the letter, the flight of Margaret, and the revelation of Alban, John Claxton was silent for a long time after Philip had concluded his tale.

"This is not the sort of case," Claxton said at last, in answer to a look from Philip, that seemed to ask why the other did not speak to him, "in which a man wants anything in the shape of comfort from any other man. Here is a very grave and sad state of things, and our business is to see how it has come about, and how it can be pulled round."

"I suppose I had better go on the continent for a time."

"Nonsense, Philip, nonsense," said his friend, much more emphatically than it was the custom of the good-natured, self-indulgent, self-preserving John Claxton to deliver himself. "You are not the fellow I take you to be if you do anything of the kind."

"Why, what better can I do?"

"I don't know. I can't tell. I don't see my way at all, yet. But one thing is certain—namely, that you must not run away. It would be madness just now. Come and stop with me in the old place here. I must think over all that you have told me, and I shall want to ask you a lot of questions. There is your old room. We'll have it ready for you by to-night. I'll tell Clarke."

"No, I think not. I don't care where I am; but——"

"Then you may as well be here as anywhere else. Besides, I repeat, I shall want you. Clarke!"

"Yes, sir," answered the latter, entering.

"Go round and tell Mrs. Bolcifer to get that room ready for somebody to sleep in to-night. Now, Philip, let us have a stroll."

"I seem to have walked miles and miles, but I don't know where I have been."

"Then we'll have a cab, and get into the air."

"I think the last time we rode in a cab together was the day I first saw Margaret. Don't you recollect—after the fête?"

"Yes. I gave you some advice."

"Which I did not take, you know," said Philip.

"You were quite right not to take it."

"I could understand your saying that a year ago, but not now."

"I say it again, nevertheless; but let us go out. Tell Mr. Ganarew I was obliged to go out, but I shall dine at the club at seven."

"Where's Biceps?" said Philip languidly.

"O, sacked. He gave parties to his young friends, the other boys,

and their Psyches, and kept his own keys of my cellar and cigar-box. I convicted him, and he howled for mercy. So I thundered at him for an hour, explained to him that the gallows in this world, and the devil in the next, were the very least he had to expect, and I got him a place as pew-opener at a new chapel at Wandsworth, where he's dressed in a sort of fancy costume, and, I dare say, pawns the prayer-books. His poor old mother thought he would come to be Lord Chancellor; but she does not think so now, I believe. Come along."

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And down in St. Oscars, too, as well as in Hastings, and in the Temple, and at Kensington, was there talk of Margaret and her flight. Whose hand, do you think, sent into the happy home of Henry and Eleanor Cheriton the tidings that the long-cherished child of that household had left her husband? Who told the story in a form like this?—

"MY DEAR FATHER,

"I sincerely hope that you will not learn from the newspapers something which it is right you should know, but which I wish I had not to tell. Break it gently—as I know you will do—to my mother, who will be deeply wounded at the news. Margaret's husband has been with me to-day, bringing miserable tidings. I was aware that there had been estrangement between them for a long time. I have seen her at the opera and elsewhere without him, and she had acquaintances of whom he and his family strongly disapproved. To-day he came here in a state of great agitation, and told me that she had eloped. She has not abandoned her child, which is not a bad sign, but she has broken up Arundel's household, and has given no clue to her retreat. I am unwilling to put upon paper what forces itself upon my mind, nor is it necessary. Poor girl! Of how little avail have been the teachings she received under our roof, and the sweet example of my mother. You know—and I am aware that you regret—that my convictions upon serious subjects differ from your own, but we must all be at one in our sorrow that the good seed which was so lovingly sown has perished in the soil. Should I succeed in obtaining poor M.'s address, I would try to get a letter safely into her hands, if you or my mother think that such an appeal might avail. You will of course use your own discretion in apprising Bertha of the evil issue of the marriage at which she was bridesmaid.

"Your affectionate Son,

"Thursday.

"ALBAN CHERITON."

"P.S.—I will use special means of getting a letter to her. One sent by the regular channel would most likely be intercepted, for evident reasons."

"Sad, sad news, dear Nelly."

The mother instantly recognised her son's writing, and became pale as ashes.

"Something has happened to Alban, or to Latimer?" was her hurried question.

"No, to neither."

"O, thank God."

"But one whom we loved almost as well, would have loved as well if she had so chosen it——"

"Margaret, dear Margaret. Dead?" asked the mother, in a terrified whisper.

"Some would say—I do not—that I wish it were only that. Poor child!"

"Ah! her husband has left her. I always feared that fatal choice. The blow has come, then."

"It is worse than that. She has left her husband."

"Henry!"

"Alban asked me to break it to you, Nelly; but you have strength to hear what must be heard."

"It is not true! It is *not* true! Yes; he has driven the poor girl from his home by his sin, or outrage. Why did she not come here?"

"There is Alban's letter, love."

"It is not true."

Mrs. Cheriton read the letter, with tearless eyes, from beginning to end, and a strange shadow came over her face—a sickening sensation woke at her heart. Was there anything in the words which womanly instinct told her was false and wrong, and which motherly love felt with a convulsing pang. Her eyes, usually ready with sympathy even for a stranger's sorrow, gave no sigh of grief, while her husband's were moist, and his voice clung to his throat.

"Destroy that letter, love," she said, in a low tone.

This was strange; for she was in the habit of begging all letters of her son's, even the merest business notes to his father, and hoarding them up in neatly-tied packets, as treasures.

"Destroy it, love," she repeated. "It means no good, and will bring no good. It should not have been written."

"Nelly," said her husband, earnestly, "for the first time in our lives we do not understand one another. Or, rather, I do not understand you."

"Please, darling, do not ask me any question just now. But wait for other news before you make up your mind what to believe about dear Margaret."

"I see, love, what *you* believe, or you would use another word. But how is it possible for Alban to be deceived? He has been very intimate of late with Margaret's husband; indeed, so intimate, that were Alban of a less stable and upright character I might have feared that the gay man of society would do him no good. Mr. Arundel comes to him, and makes the statement he sends us."

"It is much easier, I have heard you say, Henry, for a woman to be quite right than for her to shew why she is right. I feel it is true, now."

"You think that Arundel has imposed a false story on poor Alban, and that Margaret has been compelled by ill-usage to leave her home?"

"If Mr. Arundel has done that great wickedness, may God pardon him," said Mrs. Cheriton. It was no answer, however.

"But in that case," pursued Cheriton, "she ought to be here.

Surely we had earned the right to hold our door open to her whenever she was in sorrow. At least she would have written to us."

"Perhaps she has done so."

"And where is the letter?"

"Alban lays a stress upon letters being intercepted. Twice he alludes to it, if you observe, and in his postscript, which shows how his mind dwelt upon the idea. It would scarcely have come into his head accidentally."

"He may know more than he tells us."

"I fear he does," said Mrs. Cheriton, in a low voice.

"Are there to be mysteries between us, Nelly, even in thought?"

"Not for worlds, dear Henry," said his wife, taking his hand. "But we have to form a judgment on a most solemn matter, and you know my judgment is timid. I think, or you think that I am often right, but I never should be if I were hasty."

"Yet you instantly pronounced Margaret to be innocent."

"O Henry, yes, and I say it again and again. That is not the question. Dearest, if you insist on my saying what comes to my mind about this sorrowful story, I will tell you, but it will be very kind if you will let me have my thoughts to myself until we hear more."

"So be it, Nelly," said her husband. "But ought we, think you, to do nothing? Let what may have happened, here is this child, our child, charged with sin and shame. If we believed her guilty, it would be our duty to seek her out and strive to reclaim her, how much more is it our duty, if we believe her innocent, to interfere for her protection?"

"I feel all that," she answered; "but I feel, too, that we have not Margaret's real story before us. There. It is useless to ask me why I am so sure of that, for I cannot tell you; I cannot answer that question to myself. But sure I am that the little creature who used to race about this room, and kneel down at that sofa in her little nightgown and with her bare feet, to say the hymn-prayer that you made for her, has not been allowed to grow up into the woman who would do sin before God. Henry, believe that."

"Only too gladly, and from my innermost heart, darling. But what, then, does all this *mean*?" he said, holding up the letter.

Autumn was on, and the grate fireless, but Mrs. Cheriton lit a match and gave it to her husband, with a petitioning look. Alban's letter was soon in ashes.

"If the charge could be as easily done away," he said. "We must answer Alban, however."

"May I dictate what I should like said?"

"Surely, Nell?"

"Is there anything else that you have to say to him, dear?"

"Yes, I have a long account, ready written, of the interesting case I was called over to Mold about. I thought he would like to send it to the *Lancet*."

"Then I would forward it to him, Henry, and just add in a postscript that his letter of to-day 'has reached us, and caused us much painful thought.' Nothing more."

"He will think that rather a singular message."

"And that is what I should like him to think it, Henry."

"It shall go."

Bertha at this moment entered the room, with her usual cheery smile and voice.

"I hear there is a letter from Alban. Does he dare to mention me in it?"

"Why should he not?" asked her father, a look exchanged by the parents having arranged that nothing should be said to Bertha on the mournful subject.

"He is bold enough for anything; but I think after his abominable neglect of every order I gave him, he would scarcely presume to mention my name. Does he, now, mamma?"

"Yes," would have set the querist on other questions. "Yes, but you are not to ask in what connexion," would have been authoritative; but the Cheritons did not so talk to their child. "Alban's letter does not contain your name" would have been true, inasmuch as the letter was non-existent; but it would have been Jesuit's truth, which bears the same relation to the real article as Mosaic gold does.

"Yes, your name was mentioned, but it was specially left to my discretion to tell you what Alban said or not, and I use that discretion, and am silent," said Mr. Cheriton.

"He is never going to be married, papa?"

"He certainly does not say so, my dear."

"There is a lady in the case, then? What fun. Fancy the grave Alban grimly inditing love letters. O, I must write and tease him." And the light-hearted girl left the room, singing.

"If she writes and makes the mystic allusions which she is just likely to make to Alban——"

"She shall not write," said Mrs. Cheriton. "I will tell her not."

The Roman, or French, or other Emperor (it is not of the slightest consequence what his name was, for everybody tells it of a different one) who wished he had never learned to write, wished a very sensible thing. The mischief done by teaching people to write is perfectly frightful. In my Utopia there shall be licensed amanuenses for absolute necessity, and even the letters they write shall be looked over by a censor, and the penalty of expulsion shall attach to anybody else's making or using a pen.

Bertha happened to go out and call on one of her lady friends, who happened to be writing letters, and this reminded Bertha to send her brother a few lines, which went away with her friend's epistles. So that in the afternoon, when Mrs. Cheriton said,—

"Bertha, dear, don't write any nonsense to Alban; his mind is very much occupied just now, and he will hardly thank you for it;" the frank response was—

"I've done it, mamma, and the letter is halfway to London. I caught the twelve o'clock post."

"What did you say?"

"O, only three or four lines of sauciness."

"Do you remember them?"

"Yes; let me see. O yes. I said, 'We do not believe one single



word. We believe it to be an entire invention of your own. She will have nothing to say to you ; and you will have to beg pardon for your audacity, and get out of the way.' ”

“ A ladylike note, Bertha ? ”

“ Well then, he shouldn't be so rude to me, mamma. For six months I have been writing to him to buy me a reel for my fishing-rod. I wonder, as he sees so much of Mr. Arundel, that he is not more polite. Mr. Arundel is attention itself, though he is married, and the last time I was in town I did but say I wanted some gloves, and next day there came a lovely box with a dozen in it, all colours, and six and a quarter. Alban would have seen me in the street without gloves before he would have thought of such a thing.”

“ If you tore your glove, dear, Mr. Arundel could help you ; but if you tore your hand, Alban would be your better friend. Which is the intellect to be admired ? ”

“ Yes, mamma ; but don't you see that we don't make a practice of tearing our hands, while we are always spoiling our gloves ; so the every day friend is the most generally useful. But you look quite unwell, dear,” said Bertha. “ Are you not well ? Will you lie down ? Shall I draw down the blinds, and hold my tongue ? ”

“ I am not very well, love ; but it is nothing. So you said that we did not believe a word of what Alban had written, that it was all his own invention, and that she would have nothing to say to him.”

“ My dearest mother, how came my nonsense to stick so fast in your memory ? ”

“ It has done so, my dear, you see. Now get a sheet of note-paper, and write to him again. I will tell you what to say.”

“ Certainly, mamma dear.”

And the preparations being complete, Bertha wrote from her mother's dictation.

MY DEAR ALBAN,

I sent you this morning a few lines of nonsense, founded on an entire mistake. I imagined that you had written to papa and mamma, announcing your having fixed your attention upon some lady. I now write to say that I know nothing whatever as to what really were the contents of your letter.

Your affectionate Sister,

BERTHA.

If the first despatch from Bertha, received at night by her brother Alban, occasioned him a singular sensation and a restless night, he was infinitely more bewildered by the receipt of the second on the following morning, accompanied as it was by a long letter from his father, in which the case of the Mold patient was amply discussed, and the story about Margaret was dismissed in two lines. In fact, he was thoroughly perplexed. Bertha's first message seemed to bear a singular relation to the position of Mrs. Arundel, but it was explained away, only to make the explanation itself a riddle. Why was it felt necessary to clear away the idle words of a light-minded girl, unless it were felt that they might, if unrecalled, be interpreted by him in a

most objectionable manner. And why were they recalled in a formal note, so unlike the writer's ordinary style,—really a note that some defendant cheesemonger might write as apology for having slandered a plaintiff butterman's Dorset. Then the father's brief reference to a subject on which Alban naturally thought, as he opened the letter, that Mr. Cheriton had dilated at the great length actually bestowed on the leg of a smashed Welshman.

He was puzzled, and he was troubled.

For that is a bad day for a man on which he suspects, and knows he has a right to suspect, that he, the idol of his home, is in danger of tottering.

And though Alban and the rest of his profession cannot point out its seat, there is such a thing as Conscience.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## REAPPEARANCES.

It was, however, less his conscience than another motive power which made Alban Cheriton despatch his professional business as hastily as he could (and it is singular how safely patients *can* be left when the doctor really wants to get away), and betake himself to Mr. Keckling's house the day after the curious letters from St. Oscars had reached him. He wished to hear news of Margaret, and he was certain that his cousin would apply in her trouble to her old and tried friend, who, in his turn, knew no reason for excluding the young surgeon from his confidence.

He found a small and oddly-selected party in the old gentleman's dining-room that morning. Mr. Keckling himself was in the large chair, in which he imagined that he mastered the daily newspaper, which really mastered him, and gave his ideas of all public matters a form and colour for the day. Near him sat, rather upon the edge of his chair, as became an inferior, Mr. Earnshaw, the Russian merchant's trusty and trusted *employé*. But there were two other figures completing the group. One was a middle-aged, rather good-looking, but ill-dressed man, who, from his rusty black garb, might seem a broken-down clerk, but that a certain assurance of manner and, when he spoke, a louder tone than is usual with men habituated to converse with their masters, suggested some other calling. The other figure, round whose waist the arm of the rusty man was placed, as a sort of official demonstration, rather than affectionately, or so it would seem from the occasional efforts the embraced party made to escape, was that of the little girl, Zuleika, of whom we last heard at the time Mr. Robert Spencer encountered her taking a lesson at the hands of the law and its finisher.

Zuleika was looking better, in many respects, than in the old days. Her cheeks were plumper, and much cleaner, and probably the same amendment had taken place in her legs, but these were no longer visible, the brief and tawdry dress of the dancing girl having given place to a respectable dark-brown frock, coarse, but white, collar, and a tidy little hat. She had a pair of black mittens, too, which, in the old days would not have been a politic arrangement, but which she could now wear fearlessly, for she had unobjectionable nails, save that they were scraped on the inside to that whiteness which is always abnormal. The stranger, as has been said, was patronizing or protecting her in some way, but she did not seem much pleased with his attentions; and availed herself of Alban's entering to leave the rusty wing of the former, and take her independent seat on a chair near Mr. Earnshaw.

"Am I interrupting business?" said Alban.

"Not in the least, Mr. Cheriton," replied Keckling; "I particularly wanted to see you. Sit down here. I shall not be engaged many minutes, and I have something special to say to you. Here's the *Times*—capital article on Gladstone, rather severe, though—or if you

like to listen to what we're talking about, it's no secret, and may interest you. This is Mr. Earnshaw, a confidential assistant of mine;—who these are you'll hear."

With a slight inclination to Earnshaw, Alban took a seat. Earnshaw's bow in return was even slighter, but he did not mean to be rude; he had a habit of feeling that his business was to know any face that came before him, and to remember it again, and so he gave Alban that short but careful look usual to the detective, and then seemed to put away the likeness thus taken duly registered for future use. Alban, on the other hand, gave a professional glance at Zuleika, and though his features offered no sign of an opinion which he at once formed, he had also something to remember.

"Now, Earnshaw, go on with your story," said Mr. Keckling. "I should tell you, Mr. Cheriton, that this man, Harris, whom you see here, was formerly in my service, but we did not get on very well. When I write letters, I have a curious fancy to have them forwarded to the persons for whom they are meant, and Harris did not always think it worth while to humour me in that caprice."

"I made only one mistake, sir. Do me that justice."

"I found you out in one only, Harris, that I admit; but men are just like women—eh, Mr. Cheriton?"

"Those who go wrong once will go wrong twice, you mean? They say so," said Alban, "but the cases are not parallel, because woman goes wrong from weakness, and man from obstinacy. A good fright may terrify a woman into propriety for the rest of her life, but a man, not being frightened, finds a precedent in his error, and sticks to it."

"The gentleman talks like a book," interposed Harris, with composure; "but, begging his pardon, not like a wise book. Women are a great deal worse than men are." A sentiment at which Zuleika, feeling the sex outraged in her small person, made a face of contempt.

"We therefore separated," said Mr. Keckling, not choosing to take notice of the remark intruded by his inferior. "Mr. Harris went his own way, and I have lost sight of him for two or three years."

"He took the liberty of not losing sight of you, sir," said Harris. Not servilely, but with a show of earnestness, he added, "If Providence is good enough to let a weak man be taken in hand by a strong one, it is not because the strong one pitches the weak away for a bit that he is to lose all heart, and think he won't be helped at the last."

Keckling did not look displeased, but Earnshaw replied—

"I may be wrong, Harris, but I think the less you say about Providence the better. When I say that, I look at that gal." And he did look at Zuleika in a very stern manner, the sternness being intended not for the child, but for Harris.

"The subject is not one within your scope, Mr. Earnshaw," returned Harris, who did not appear to entertain the least respect for the confidential man, and perhaps restrained himself out of regard for Mr. Keckling from a more uncivil retort. "You are ordered to tell a story, not to make your own obnoxious remarks upon the *dramatis personæ*."

[A hint, by the way, which, if taken, would make a good many books pleasanter reading.]

"Mr. Keckling," said Earnshaw, addressing himself to Alban, "of course turned this man Harris away, and naturally he went to the bad."

"It should be explained, sir," said Harris, with a smile, "that I became a dissenting minister, which, as Mr. Earnshaw says, naturally seems dreadfully bad in his eyes, as he is naturally attached to the Established Church, being, naturally, the son of a very drunken headle, deceased."

Earnshaw was too well trained to allow his anger to explode in the presence of his master, and proceeded.

"A dissenting minister means anything, or everything, or nothing. I have seen a dissenting minister in a very good gig. But this man took to preaching about the streets, and collecting halfpence from the mob."

"Congregation," whispered Harris, mildly.

"Nice congregation," said Earnshaw, with so much acerbity that Alban had some reason for thinking Harris's irreverent sketch of the other's ecclesiastical origin was accurate. "Thieves and rascals."

"The more in need, then, of my ministration," returned Harris, with mock self-complacency.

"I dare say the shepherd and his flock were very well suited," said Mr. Keckling, but not in an unkind tone. "However, you did not prosper as a clergyman, Harris, for reasons into which, I suppose, it is unnecessary to go."

"The only reason was, sir, that not having been brought up at a charity-school, like Mr. Earnshaw, and soundly flogged if ever I said my soul was my own, I had not quite that command of temper which is desirable in a minister of the Gospel, and when my congregation chaffed me too much, I punched their heads. But I was liked, and I made money, till the police were set on me by a pack of infidel tradesmen, who alleged that I caused fights under their windows. Luther once threw his inkstand at the devil, and I once shied a pint pot at a mocking Ethiopian serenader—I don't know whether the devil was hurt, but I cut the black chap's head open a bit—a handle was made of it, and I had to give up the ministry."

"And then I think you became a mountebank of another kind."

"I must not venture to ask you to choose other words than those you please to employ, sir," said Harris; "but if I were telling my own story I should say that, not being permitted to address the public about their immortal souls, I tried another way to benefit them. The stage, sir, as you know quite well, is a great moral engine, and the object of writing, and getting up, and acting plays is the doing good in the way of shaming vice and encouraging virtue. Actors are, in fact, missionaries under another name, and so I joined that missionary society."

"And I should think that before the child," said Mr. Earnshaw, "being of the sex she is, you might hold your tongue about what got you out of an engagement at twenty-five shillings a-week."

"The business of the stage," retorted the unabashed Harris, "is to

show vice its own image, and I allow that circumstances induced me to personate the character with more fidelity than was perhaps necessary. That the lady of my manager had a taste for a dark eye and an intellectual countenance was to be regretted, still more so that in carrying out that taste she carried out an ormolu clock and a few similar trifles, which I had not dreamed of her bringing with her in her flight."

"You got six months for that," said Earnshaw.

"They passed, I trust, improvingly. Nay, I may say I know improvingly, for when I entered the donjon keep in which I was to be incarcerated, I could not have picked a lock to save my life. Long before my release, I had learned seven ways of opening a locked box, to say nothing of other instruction."

"And yet if you put a rascal into a separate cell," said Mr. Keckling, almost in a rage, "they say you make him mad."

"There is no such thing as made madness," said Alban, hastily.

The tone and manner were so unlike his usual calm, sententious delivery that Keckling remembered the speech many a day after.

"The story is took out of my hands," said Earnshaw.

"Taken, Mr. Earnshaw," said Harris. "What might you not have been, sir, if Lindley Murray had but been a charity-school book? But there is not much more to tell."

"I think there is," returned Earnshaw. "I think there's something to be told about a man who robbed another man, a manager of a theayter, of his wife, child, and property; and when the woman, who, bad as she was, had some feeling, died of a broken heart——"

"There is no such thing as a broken heart," again broke in Alban, abruptly. "Why do people use such infernally foolish words?"

"I am sure I am very sorry," said Earnshaw, deferential to one whom he saw stood well with his master. "Anyhow, the poor thing died."

"Disease, starvation, ill-treatment, many things will kill," replied Alban, instantly recovering his calmness. "There is no reason for accusing Nature of making bungling work."

"What I was coming to," said Earnshaw, "was that the mother having died, as she did, the child whom you might have thought the man would have tried to provide for, was left to chance and the parish."

"You trace all the beadle in that charge," said Harris. "It is true, nevertheless, in words, but false in fact. There was no choice for me, I was sent to prison; and when I came out, what could I do?"

"You could have written begging letters," said Zuleika, suddenly speaking for the first time, and not much to the delight of her audience.

"I wrote *one* begging letter," said Harris, "which was to Mr. Keckling, stating my case and my sorrow, and praying him, by the memory of old services, to send me and the child to the colonies."

"Then you retained old habits," said Keckling, "and did not send the letter, for I never had it."

"That I can easily understand, sir," said Harris, "though it was

delivered at your door by my own hand. It is not worth while asking where it went."

"You accuse somebody of intercepting it?" asked Keckling.

"I prefer to accuse nobody, sir, as no good could now be done by its being all explained." He kept his eyes away steadily from Earnshaw as he spoke. "I only say that I made one attempt to provide for the child who had thus come into my keeping, and that it failed. Afterwards, I lost her, which was no fault of mine."

"No, I bolted," said Zuleika, "that air a fact?"

"This—the child?" said Alban, to whom the identity of Zuleika with the daughter of the unfortunate woman in question had not occurred.

"I'm the child," said Zuleika, "so treat me tenderly, for I was reared a pct." And she broke into a shrill laugh at the contrast between her words and the truth. "The fact was, the governor had the change taken out of him at the mill, and he was so uncommon frightened at what he'd gone through, that he would try for nothing that he couldn't come by in an honest way. Honesty's all very fine, but herrings and bread and water five times a week didn't suit this child at all. So I wished him good morning, if you please, and turned my talents to better account."

"She had learned to dance and that a bit with her father and mother, and so she joined some low people, and danced at public-houses and bad places."

"Never was in a bad place in my life," returned Zuleika, pertly, "unless old Spencer's is one, in Gower-street."

"What do you know of Mr. Spencer's?" asked Alban, surprised.

"Kitchen, outhouse, garden, likewise front parlour and hall," said the girl. "Didn't like to go higher, for fear of fire."

"There is truth in it," said Mr. Keckling to Alban. "Mr. Robert Spencer found her in his kitchen, being ill-treated by a servant, one evening, and he behaved kindly to her; but her bad nature came out, and she ran away from him in a most ungrateful manner, after he had given her food and money. They're all alike!"

"I wasn't ungrateful," said the child, with earnestness. "But I had the office, and I didn't want to be licked again. Old Spencer knew that. He came late at night where I was dancing, and if he was drunk he knew me again. He has no call to say I was ungrateful. I could have robbed his house many a time, and there was them as would have been glad to see me do it."

"Before he was kind to you, that was," said Earnshaw. "You never were in the house afterwards?"

"Before or behind, what's the odds?" said Zuleika, defiantly.

Alban Cheriton watched the child with attention, and sought to learn more of her.

"And may I ask," said he to Mr. Keckling, "with what object these persons are here?"

"Well," said Keckling, "you may say that I am a foolish sentimental fellow, who might easily find better persons to assist than either of these—a man whom I discharged for misconduct and who found his way into prison for robbery, and a child whom I dare say

you think, as I do, as bad a little creature as you'll find within four walls. But I have my whims, and sometimes I humour them. I am inclined to do the precious pair some good, if they would let me."

"Fire away and welcome," said the irredeemable Zuleika. But Harris kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"I don't gather, I think," said Alban, "from what I have heard, what their occupations have lately been, or how they came to be together again. I do not ask explanation out of mere curiosity, as I think it possible that I might suggest something to you, Mr. Keckling."

"It was Mr. Keckling's wish, sir," said Earnshaw, "that they should be found, and found they were accordingly. Harris will tell you himself what he was doing."

"So will Zuleika," broke in the girl. "She was dancing a hornpipe in the costume of a British sailor, and will oblige the company with it on the table, if desired by several persons of distinction."

"Be quiet, child, quiet," said Keckling, compassionately.

"She will be quiet enough before long," said Alban to him, in an undertone.

"I have been bad enough," said Harris, whose self-sufficient and self-sustaining tone seemed at times to desert him, especially when he was addressed by Mr. Keckling. "I have been bad enough, and it may not be of much consequence what I do. But there is no use in making things worse than they are. When I was found, as Mr. Earnshaw calls it, and if he is to have any credit for finding me, pray let him have it, I was selling play bills, or trying to sell them."

"And I did hear something about your being very handy at finding particular cabmen to take home young swells who were tipsy, and had money and jewellery about them, which is a very thoughtful thing in you," said Earnshaw.

"Give a dog a bad name," said Harris, calmly. "It happened once that a cabman robbed a gentleman in a cab I had called, and as I had been in prison before, of course it was my business to put tipsy gentlemen into thieves' cabs, and I got large pickings by it. What a pity my father wasn't a beadle."

"That will do," said Keckling. "You have had temptations, and have yielded to them, and have been punished, but ought not to be persecuted. I shall have something to say to you presently. Meantime, you will be none the worse, either of you, for something to eat."

"I wondered when you was going to cut the dialect and come to the sassingers," said Zuleika, misquoting a stage direction given by the late Mr. Ducrow for shortening a piece.

"I will send for you presently," said Keckling, entrusting Harris and the child to a servant, with orders to make them comfortable.

"Will not Mr. Earnshaw honour us?" said Harris, seeing the latter linger behind. "Grace said by the son of a beadle would indeed have an unction—sound quite prayerbookish."

Earnshaw had several times looked at his master, as if to say, "I must not resent these taunts, but you ought to protect me." But Mr. Keckling was not pleased to interfere, and as his man remained, as if to be taken into counsel, said—



"I shall not want you until to-morrow, Earnshaw."

Mr. Keckling never spoke twice on the same subject to his dependents, and the trusted man, for all his trustedness, could only bow and retire. He would not have dared to be found about the house ten minutes later. Keckling owned that he had whims, and one of them was to be master of his servants.

"A curious lot, are they not?" he said to Alban, as soon as they were alone.

"You had better let the child call on me," said the latter. "I am afraid she is past help; but we may as well see."

"Is that so?" said Keckling, gravely.

"Consumption, evidently. Bad food, too little of it, ill-usage, exposure at night, over-exertion, very likely constant stimulants. A child is not such a difficult thing to kill, my dear sir."

"But," said Keckling, "I conclude the seeds of the disease were implanted before she began that kind of life."

"It is not necessary to suppose so," said the young surgeon.

It would, however, have been a comfort to Mr. Keckling to be allowed to suppose it. For the truth was, that the case of poor Harris had been resting upon his mind for a long time; and something having occurred to bring the subject forcibly before him, he had ordered that Earnshaw should make search for the discarded clerk. It may be remembered that in the interview between Earnshaw and his employer, when the former came to report that Armandale Spencer had come to England, and was in lodgings in Half-Moon-street, Mr. Keckling had ordered Earnshaw to have Harris at hand, if wanted. Earnshaw had, at the time, failed to find his man, but said nothing of this to his master, from whose thoughts other matters, including Margaret's affairs, had driven the subject; but by what was great good luck (Mr. Keckling's despotic notions being remembered) the *employé* was fortunate enough to be able to make a satisfactory reply when Keckling next referred to the topic. Harris's history was placed before his late master.

It may also occur to a reader to ask how Zuleika's connexion with Harris came before Mr. Keckling. The very simple answer may, we fear, damage the character of Mr. Earnshaw for benevolence. He, hating Harris, and having become master of the latter's story, had determined that if Keckling thought of conferring a benefit on the discharged clerk it should not be without full knowledge of the facts, and he therefore took pains to discover Zuleika, and went so far, in order to make her a more presentable object, and one more likely to excite Mr. Keckling's fastidious sympathies, as to have her taken care of for a short time by some friends of his own, and to introduce her in the becoming guise that has been described. Who will not be tempted to deny that there is actually any evil in the world, when they perceive that the workings of a passion which we call evil thus induced a man to feed the hungry and clothe the naked? Nay, the apostle from Tarsus takes similar ground, touching the preaching of the Gospel, not caring whether it is even done from actual ill-will to one's rivals.

"I am very glad you called to-day," said Mr. Keckling. "The

fact is—but perhaps you are already informed of it—that Mrs. Arundel has taken a step that must occasion us all much embarrassment.”

“In leaving town?” said Alban, wishing to be as guarded as possible.

“Leaving town?” repeated Keckling; “that is nothing. Anybody may leave town. But do you know with whom she has left town?”

For one moment all the blood in Alban Cheriton’s body seemed driven back upon his heart; for one moment he endured one of those sensations into which are concentrated the agony of a life. But it was only, as it needed be only, for a moment. Had he built up the throne for another? Had he poisoned Margaret’s home-happiness that some other than himself might teach her to be happy? An instant, and the thought was driven from him. In the hour of his deadliest purpose he was forced to do justice to the character of Margaret. He might hope hereafter to move her heart towards himself; but he felt that her heart at that moment, however troubled, was pure to its inmost depths. The pang that shot through him, and the thought that removed it, vindicated the cause of her whom he strove to destroy.

His emotion was, of course, misunderstood by the old man.

“Ah,” he said, “then you do not know. It is most lamentable, most grievous. She has gone with her father.”

“With her father?—what, the—the—”

“You may well hesitate over a word that is bad enough for him. But see this.”

And he showed Alban the telegraphic despatch which Armandale Spencer had sent to the elder Arundel, and of which the latter, in much bewilderment, had apprised Mr. Keckling, with an earnest request for their immediate meeting.

“Her father!” repeated Alban, who, relieved of all his first sensations, was engaged in considering how far his own views would be promoted or hindered by this singular complication of the adventure.

“It must estrange her from Arundel still more—much more,” he thought. “The black character of old Spencer—Philip’s fury at learning from me that Margaret knew the whole story—and now her taking Armandale as her companion and friend, and proclaiming it to Marmaduke Arundel and his family.”

And sad indeed was the tone in which, turning to Mr. Keckling, he deplored the step Margaret had taken, and the impressions into which she must have been deluded.

“I would to God I could see that it was only a delusion, my dear Mr. Cheriton. If it were only a mistake, there would be nothing in it. But Margaret knew so well what a rascal had been given her, poor girl, for a father. I had taken such pains to make her understand his character, and the difficulties that surrounded her, and so had another valued friend, and then she takes the fatal step of associating herself with this very man. What could my darling child have been thinking about?”

“Then,” said Alban, sadly, “matters have gone further than I had

imagined. The quarrel with her husband must have been more enduring than such a thing needed to be."

"Quarrel!" repeated Keckling. "Why, that was all made up;—in fact, it was no quarrel at all. Why, she was here, and they were very good friends, and she went for a drive while we, that is the two Arundels and myself, discussed what was to be done with the old rascal. I saw her smiling at Philip; they were on the best of terms."

"Then you do not know that my cousin broke up the home in St. John's Wood, discharged the servants, and went out of town, nobody knowing where, not even her husband. This despatch is my first intimation of her retreat: Philip will, of course, learn it from his father."

"Mr. Philip Arundel has driven her to this," said the old man, white with anger.

"If I thought so," said Alban, "I——"

"Thought so;—I tell you it is so, Alban Cheriton. You are out of the world, or have the brains to avoid its follies, but that young fool, Philip, to whom has fallen a prize every way too good for him, has lived recklessly, neglected and insulted his wife, and has now forced her into the arms of her worthless father. I wish I had never had art or part in the marriage. I wish I had prevented it, as I could have done."

"As you could have done!" repeated Alban, wonderingly. "I know your influence with Margaret was deservedly great——"

"Influence—bah! I had something stronger than influence."

As if Alban did not know that, having supplied Mr. Keckling with the very article.

"But it is of no use talking of the past. And she has never written to me. I have been doing her injustice. I thought, poor child, that she did not dare to write because she knew how strongly I felt about Mr. Armandale Spencer. It was another cause that held her hand. She would not willingly tell me of the misconduct of her unworthy husband."

"Such a reason certainly was more in accordance with her beautiful character," said Alban, "than mere timidity, or shame at owing to what she had thought it right to do."

"You are right, sir. It is a beautiful character, and deserves to be appreciated. I wish to God she had married a man, and not a coxcomb. I wish you had cared about her;—I thought you did at one time. If you had entered the lists against Arundel he would have had no chance; but so it was to be, I suppose."

"I know no man worthy of Margaret, Mr. Keckling."

"No more do I, Mr. Cheriton; but some men are less unworthy than others. And never could there be a man more unworthy of her than Philip Arundel. I was very furious with him the last time he was here, for his high and mighty airs, and his coldness towards a girl whose little finger is worth his soul and body together, but I never thought he would have gone on and driven her to this. But I don't blame her. By God, I don't blame her," said the old man, dashing his fist upon the table, and looking Alban hard in the face. "I

blame him, Philip, her infernal husband, who has spoiled her, as far as so noble and dear a creature can be spoiled. I blame nobody else. Even her damned thief of a father is not so bad. He is only fighting for himself, and if he does her mischief it is not because he wants to injure her, but only because she comes across his path. But the other fellow, who had all that was heavenly and lovely given him in your cousin, for him to show that he is a wretch, and to force her to leave his house—by the Lord, Mr. Cheriton, I should like to shoot him. It would be a dangerous thing, Mr. Cheriton, for him to come in my way."

And having paused from raging and swearing a little, Mr. Keckling sat down, and began to consider the case anew.

"I will go down to her," he said, after a pause. "I'll let her understand her mistake in associating with her father; but I'll assure her that in leaving her damnable husband, she has done exactly the right thing, and that he is a thoroughly bad fellow. She shall come here. She shall be mistress of this house."

Part of this plan suited Alban's views. That the breach between Philip and Margaret should be widened by her old friend's approbation of her conduct was exactly what Alban could have desired, and to any proposed vituperation of Philip, Mr. Cheriton gave his heartiest assent. But, on the other hand, the detaching Margaret from the new-found ally of Alban, namely Armandale Spencer, whose influence in estranging her from her friends would be very formidable, was by no means so much to be wished, and the installing Margaret in Mr. Keckling's house, where she would find a second happy home, with all its pleasures and society, was not to be wished at all. Yet, what was to be done? Mr. Keckling, when he had made up his mind to a course, could seldom be checked. Alban would accept the situation as it stood, and take his own line.

"I am rejoiced to hear that you will do this, sir," he said. "I love Margaret better, I think, than any brother ever loved his sister, and it wounds me to the heart that one who was bred up among us, and so dear to us all, should, through no fault of her own, be so sorely tried and harassed. I would go down with you, myself, to Hastings, if you accepted my companionship, only I have an operation to-morrow on which more is staked than the welfare of the patient—my professional reputation—or I would transfer the case to a friend."

"I shall start to-night. You can follow, you know. Will you copy the address?"

Alban had the address at home, but he made a pretext of taking a note of it.

"I will start to-night," repeated the old man. "I will say that I have seen you, and that your feelings are exactly the same as mine. She will be glad, poor girl, that you approve her conduct."

"Why," said Alban, suddenly recollecting that he had left "a loose end" that demanded tying, "I have copied this address mechanically, and without noticing it. But I see she has gone to the very house which I recommended to her, and indeed wrote about. She had been uncomfortable as to the state of her child, and I had counselled sea-air. I am very glad of that—you will find her in an excellent lodging,

where, if she had to stay at Hastings, she would be very well off." And he gave Mr. Keckling directions how to find the house.

"Now I will leave you," said Alban, "as you have some preparations to make. By the way—a much graver matter had nearly put it out of my head, but you will perhaps tell that child to call on me."

"Child?"

"Yes, the man Harris's child; or at least ——"

"I had forgotten they were here. His business must stand over until I come back from Hastings. But just see the girl yourself as you go down—call her up into the hall, and give her your orders."

"You will bring Margaret to town?"

"Assuredly, if she will come."

"I trust she will see no objection to that. It is the best thing she could possibly do."

"I will tell her that you say so."

As he went out Alban called to Zuleika, and asked her to come and see him. The young lady's reply need not be set down, but she gave her promise, and kept it.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### ANOTHER TANGLE.

WHO dares set our children copies, saying that "Beauty is of Small Account compared with Goodness?" Tear the leaf out wherever you see such profanity. Beware of putting such falsehood into copy-books, O parents and guardians! Lord Eldon has deprived some of you of the custody of children for less offences. Write, on the contrary, in your best copper-plate, for transcription by our innocents, that "Beauty is the best gift to woman"—provided a woman be a lady, by which of course I mean somebody whose family is well to do. Beauty, under our existing Christian arrangements, is a hindrance to dependents; for what sensible lady likes her governess to be prettier than her daughter, or her maid to be prettier than herself? and to the poor girl, no doubt, the possession of a charming face is, under our Christian arrangements aforesaid, a curse bestowed by some malignant fairy, protectress of casino lovers, and the rest of the aristocracy. But, dear and respectable woman, lawfully married wife, down upon your knees morning and evening, and thank Providence if you have been made beautiful, or have reason to think so. Thank Providence, I repeat to you, for a gift that has saved or will save you two-thirds of the vexations which make up life. If you only knew its value! You think you do; but, as the Queen of Sheba complained to Solomon the Wise, one half has not been told. It won your husband, that you know quite well, though you pretend to think that accomplishments, sweetness, high-breeding, and all that were your real charms. Stuff! he married you for

your beauty, and would tell you so, but for reasons which I will not betray. And it is by your beauty that you keep him—I wont say constant, we are all that, you know—but attentive, considerate, generous, forgiving, enduring. I tell you, madam, that if you were a plain woman you would be treated in a far different manner. The plain ones all are. Some know it, but are too vain to say so—some don't know it, but it is true. If an ugly woman said to a husband a quarter of the unpleasant things that you say, he would pack her off into the country on a separate maintenance. If she ran up such a milliner's bill as you calmly asked your husband to cast up the other morning—as quietly assuming a cheque for it as the raw young voluble dissenting missionary going to the Hottentots said, in answer to an instructing friend, that of course he should assume justification by faith—it would be tossed back to her with a growl, if the man were a gentleman, and an oath if he were a snob. If she wrote him, he being away, the careless and scanty letter that you wrote the other day, and which you would hardly have written at all but that you wanted money for a ball-dress (whereas she sent him sixteen sides of clearly written, affectionate, and amusing stuff, not at all a bore to read, and very good hints for his dinner-table-talk at the country house), she would have had a brief extract from the counter-foils of his cheques for the year, and an intimation that she would have no more money till Christmas, when he meant to retrench. But you are beautiful, or he thinks so. He likes that face, and he is weak enough not to like to see, or to imagine it (which is worse, because one imagines gentleness and misses abuse) in a melancholy state, tears gathering in the eyes, disappointment clouding the features, perhaps embarrassment at his conduct giving the countenance a really piteous effect. That's why you get the playful answer and the kiss in return for your rudeness, when you ought to have a box on the ears. That is why the party is given, the opera-box taken, the visit to Brighton accorded, and when you send your half-sulky letter for money, then, as Mr. Tennyson says—

Thy face across his fancy comes,  
And gives the cheque-book to his hands.

Be thankful, too, for your small mercies—your small waist, small hand, small foot, small talk, but above all, dear woman, be thankful that you have got one of those faces which a man of average sensibility does not like to see in discontent or distress.

An ugly woman (I never saw one in all my life, I solemnly declare it, but I am told that there are many) will remark upon this that a man so actuated must be a fool and unworthy of the regard of an intellectual being. This I am ready to admit without the slightest qualification, but that is not to the purpose. One does not write to arraign the dispositions of nature. She has created us as we are, and she has also created black-beetles, toads, mosquitoes, and other things the use whereof we are unable to discover. The mystery will some day be cleared up, and we shall know at the same time what fools were made for. Let that pass, and O ye, whom we insult by calling angels, seeing that our pictures can but typify an angel by a bad

resemblance to yourselves, once more give thanks that you are lovely, and endeavour to keep so.

I have advanced some detestable propositions, and it might be politic to withdraw them. No, let us be martyrs to the truth, if it must be so, and let the book be thrown down with contempt, or sent back with fierce comment in pencil to the circulating library. Also am I open to milder remonstrances. "Then do you *not* think—do you really not think that there is something in a woman's intellect, in her regard for you, in her obedience and devotion, that can enchain a man, even if she be less attractive than——" Hold your tongue, madam, and don't be a Hypocrite. I know what I, myself, think of that bad forehead of yours, and that sulky upper lip, and the hair which that lying Stipple, who painted your horrible picture there, calls (to your face) auburn, and the extremely unpleasant mouth, and ugly ear, and I also know how you would describe them if they appertained to any of your dearest friends. But I know also what you think of them yourself, and what you thought of them while you were putting in the bandoline before your toilette-glass this morning, and nagging away all the time at Jones in his dressing-room—and, madam, I know what Jones thought and still thinks of them, and so do you. What's the good of talking hypocrisy? Do you believe yourself an ugly woman? Do you believe that Jones thinks you are, or suspects it, or murmurs such a suspicion to himself when down in his cellar, or bathing in the sea, or on the Stock Exchange, or elsewhere, out of the possibility of your hearing him? You know better. Have I made my peace?

Frantic and furious we have seen was Philip Arundel, as he stood upon Hampstead Heath, and, like Achilles, shouted to the skies, declaring that he was a fool to marry. In miserable sort was Philip Arundel, when he wept in the chambers of his friend. And dreary and doleful were Philip Arundel's days thenceforth, and still more dreary and doleful his nights. He had his wrong to comfort him, and let folks say what they will, a good wrong is a warm, lively companion, almost as pleasant as a fire, and cheaper. But even a lively wrong grows a bore at times. Poor Philip became very much depressed, and would even talk—I need hardly say without the faintest intention of the kind—of making away with himself. A much surer sign of his desponding state was that he began to neglect his dress, and made very little riot and disturbance when an idiotic laundress used common instead of patent blacking to his shoes. He walked about the Temple Gardens a good deal, and chewed several miles of toothpicks, cursing his destiny, but somehow managing to remember the dinner hour. And—for no one supposes we had all that elegant writing about beauty for nothing—he was perpetually haunted by the sweet face of Margaret, his wife. It was her face that had originally secured him, and her face had its old charm and power. It came before him at all times and in all places. He saw it at the breakfast-table, where it was wont to appear so fresh and kindly, and the reality of John Claxton's face seemed very *hard*. Jack's demand whether there was any news, as Philip skimmed the paper (Jack minded his meals, and read afterwards), was couched in about the

same words that Margaret would use, but the arch face that, as in old times, peeped round the corner of his paper as the question was asked, had braids and earrings, which was not Mr. Claxton's costume. A face at the door, as he went out, had lips which whispered to him not to be late unless he had something very pleasant to engage him, and lips which had something else to do, and when he had departed the face still attended on him, looked at a picture with him, smiled at a contretemps, turned pale at a street accident, waxed sorrowful at a sad story. It was at his table at dinner, and he sometimes felt, after a bottle or so, as if he could fill a wine glass as he had been used to do for the Presence that was perpetually there. It was in the best chair in the private box, a chair which he took with a sort of reluctance, it was by his side in the cab, it was holding a spill to light his cigar, it stooped a sweet and visionary mouth to taste whether his grog was nicely mixed, it took the shirt-pin from his cravat—in fact the presence was always before him—a beautiful face to which he was gradually preparing to forgive everything, to which he was almost bringing himself to concede that he, too, had something to be forgiven. If Margaret had been a plain girl—but then, as has been before remarked in the course of this history, she would never have been Mrs. Philip Arundel.

Claxton, to whose guidance Philip had surrendered himself, had interdicted his taking any step of any kind in reference to Mrs. Arundel. John Claxton, whether by instinct or by reasoning, had arrived at one conviction—namely, that he had not got the whole case before him. And until he should have the case before him, he refused to act or to allow his friend to act. Meantime he was not idle; but, on the contrary, was using his best endeavours to supply himself with materials for a judgment. Claxton was no lawyer, for his wealthy uncle had been satisfied that his nephew should be a barrister, but he was keen, shrewd, and worldly—the last word being used in its least severe sense—and he privately piqued himself upon what he called the faculty of seeing into things. He could moreover hold his tongue until he could use it with advantage, and though not exactly like Mr. Addison's Cato,

A proper person to entrust  
A love-tale with,

he was not by any means the least desirable of counsellors when you doubted whether the heroine of your love-tale were playing you fair, or worth your attention. John believed a good deal in women—that is, if they happened to be perfectly thorough-bred (holding, however, the mass of his countrywomen in a most objectionable contempt and derision), and he had been pleased to confer this title upon Margaret, despite all her antecedents. He had written her down a lady, and he meant to do his best for her. I am truly sorry that I cannot depict him as more chivalrous, and as looking upon woman as a being to be helped and protected under all circumstances. I can describe the man only as he was and is, and if a woman had had a plebeian laugh, or a vulgar habit of any kind, if ever an aspirate had fallen from her chaplet of articulation or been wrongly garnered thereto, John Claxton would



not have felt that it was any part of his business to help that sort of person. I don't know that he would not have let his clerk at chambers take in "pink notes" for her husband. But for Mrs. Arundel he had resolved to do his utmost, and he even thought that he owed it to her to do so, having once tried as hard as he prudently could to prevent her being Mrs. Arundel.

Claxton put himself into immediate communication with Philip's father, whose senatorial intellect—though of course adequate to decide upon the relations and welfare of nations, or he would not have been elected—were not equal to the task of disentangling his son's position. Mr. Arundel was very much bewildered and very much grieved. He loved and was proud of his son, and he had also become deeply attached, as has been seen, to his son's wife, and that two persons for whom the good and kind old man felt nothing but affection, and whom he would have done anything to serve, should combine, voluntarily or not, to give him pain and perplexity, and all without warning, completely—to use a household word—overset him. He would hardly talk to Claxton about it, but gladly recognised him as the common friend of all parties, and left the matter in his hands. Perhaps, from old experiences, he had some kind of idea that his son might not be by any means blameless in the business, and this fact he was naturally in no hurry to see proved. But he had all a gentleman's love of justice, and at the right time he would see justice done to Margaret. Meantime, it was more pleasant—or at least less unpleasant to him—to let the matter take its course a little; and if Mr. Claxton would be so good as to form an opinion, and let him know what he thought, it would be kind. And it may be mentioned (who among us is without other motives than those we parade?) that Mr. John Claxton had reasons of his own for wishing to stand well in the good graces of the father of a certain person. He was glad, however, that the absence of the Misses Arundel, who were visiting in Sussex, prevented his having to discuss the subject ever so slightly with them; for, not having made up his own mind on the case, he did not want it made up for him, as, of course, is the practice when the object of one's admiration has formed her opinion upon a subject.

When Mr. Arundel received the telegraphic message from Armandale Spencer the senator simply enclosed a copy of it (for it would not have been senatorial to send the original) to Claxton, with a line or two to the effect that "comment was beyond his power," and for once he did not follow the conventional course, and instantly attempt that of which he had declared himself incapable. Mr. Keckling, having called upon the member for Shacklington, had the same despatch put into his hand, and impetuously impounded it, to be used as we have seen. That despatch decided more than one person on a line of action.

"I asked you to call about one, young lady," said Alban Cheriton, as the person he addressed—our acquaintance (mine, I beg the respectable reader's pardon) Maria.

"Well, it isn't three," responded the girl.

"Nearer four; but no matter. How are you going on?"

"I don't know. Worse, I believe; but you don't care enough about that to send for me to ask after my health. Come."

"Very unkind of you to say so. Now it happens that I am going out of town, and I wished to see you before I went. Have you taken all the medicine I gave you?"

"Yes, every drop. No, I broke the bottle in my way home."

"Which story is true?"

"Whichever you likes—you pays your——"

"Spare me that, Maria. You've said it so often."

"And how am I to get new jokes, do you think? I don't live so cheerful a life that I can be always inventing clever things to amuse you, Mr. Sulky."

"Do you find it dull?"

"Does a duck swim?"

"Well, will you like a companion, if I find you one?"

"Most likely not. I should think a companion of your finding would be a lively lot. Who is it? A living skeleton?"

"We are all living skeletons."

"Speak for yourself, please. I am nothing of the kind. Look at my arms; do you call those skeleton arms?"

And she drew back her dress and sleeves, and bared a couple of round and pretty arms, rather large, perhaps for her height, but the fault would hardly have occurred to any but a hypercritic. They were also very white, and seemed made to be ornamented.

"I'll give you a bracelet for one of those handsome limbs," said Alban, "if you do as I ask you."

"Don't call them limbs; it sounds like an operation going to be performed. Well, what do you want done? No good, I suppose; when did a man ever pay a woman to do good for him?"

"Why should he when he can do it himself, and it goes against her nature?"

"I believe you are right, and that we are awful bad. But who makes us so?"

"Don't be profane, Maria. I am always reproving you for that error, so very objectionable in a woman."

"What do you mean by profane? I mean that it is you men who bring us up as fools, and teach us nothing but sin, and then shrug shoulders at one another like hypocrites, and say how precious bad we are."

"I never say so. What sort of a bracelet will you like?"

"Don't care. Only mind that it's one that looks handsome, and will find favour if I take it round to my uncle some day, to see if it will fit my aunt or any of my lady cousins."

"Don't do that. Come to me when you are driven to that strait."

"Another liberal offer. You must want me to commit something dreadful. If it's murder, mention it, as Keeley says."

"I want you to have a child home at your house."

"And poison it? I shan't."

"Don't be so ridiculous. So far from that, I wish you to take every care of her. Of course, I'll pay all expenses."

"O, it's a her. How old is her?"

"Nine—ten, perhaps. I hardly know, but somewhere about that age."

"What! the mother so completely forgotten? O, you men!"

"Nonsense. I don't know who the mother is. I never saw her in my life. But I want the child, who has been a good deal neglected, taken care of for a time, and I should think it would be just the thing for you. Nothing like a child to set a woman's thoughts into healthy action."

"Ah," said the girl, "I thought so once." And her thoughts strayed back to a sad time, and a miserable November afternoon, and a little coffin borne away in the wet to a melancholy London churchyard, and a weeping mother roused the same evening from the hearth-rug, and pulling back her dishevelled hair to answer a bullying creditor's demand for an instalment of a debt, most improperly neglected while a baby was dying.

"Think so again," said Alban, not unkindly, and after a pause to let a current of idea, which he pretty well guessed at, run its course. "Think so again. This child is a sort of patient of mine—at least a valued friend takes a good deal of interest in her, and I have promised to see to her a little."

"O, but what's the matter with her?" asked Maria. "If you want a nurse, I don't much see it in that light."

"There is nothing the matter with her, except that she has lived carelessly, and been rather hardly treated, and wants bringing into condition."

"Well, I'll see how I like her, if you choose to send her on those terms; but if she does not please me, whether it's her fault or mine—and it's most likely to be mine—you are to take her off my hands."

"Certainly, at any time. Then I may send her to you?"

"Send away. What's her name? Norval on the Grampian hills?"

"Almost as absurd—Zuleika. But call her what you like."

"So I don't call her too late for dinner, eh? And what's her surname?"

"Harris."

"Yes, I thought she came of the Harrises—or of the Walkers. But I don't want to pry into your secrets—what are they to me? Send Miss Harris, as soon as you like, to the original old-established shop for manners and morals, kept by Maria Prescott, spinster. N.B. —Copy the address."

"There would be some fun in you, Maria, if you did not affect that ridiculous mixture of levity and despair."

"It is not affectation. I feel so. I feel like the pig that they fed one day and starved the next, to make alternate streaks of fat and leau, only my streaks come oftener. Talking of mixtures, make me up another bottle, please, in place of that I broke." [He can't mean me any harm just now, as he's sending me a lodger, thought poor Maria.]

"Very well, I will. But I think I shall alter my treatment of you when I come back to town."

"I think you ought, for it isn't half polite enough, considering the service I have been to you."

Alban's face suddenly assumed a look so stern and fierce that the poor girl trembled before him. He observed her agitation, and continued to watch her steadily for some moments. Her eye fell before his, and when she looked up again he had mastered his features. Then came to her the recollection that she had his secret, and she summoned courage and looked him full in the face. There was a working of his proud lip, as if in wrath with himself, but—his eye, in its turn, became uneasy, and he turned away.

"I wish I had never come here," she said to herself as Alban left the room. "There will no good come to me of any dealings with that man. But what's the odds? I wish I was dead!"

And when her medical friend returned with the medicine, she was singing a melody of American Ethiopia, recording the decease of a certain Ancient Edward, gone where the good niggers go.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### VIRGINIUS ON GUARD.

"AND never write to me! that was the worst of all," said Mr. Keckling.

"Dear Mr. Keckling, as if I should not write to you before anybody, when I am in trouble."

"Then you are not in trouble, my love?"

"How *can* you ask such a question? If you could be unkind, I should say you wanted to be so now."

"Then, once more, my dear, why did you not write to me directly?"

"And that was the very thing I did, the first day I came here."

"Who posted the letter, dear?"

"The servant here. You do not mean to say that you never had it?"

"To use your own words, how can you ask such a question? Do you think I should not have been with you by the next train?"

"I thought that you were so angry with me that you would not answer," said Margaret. "You have taken such a weight off my heart."

"Dear child, confidence, as somebody said, is a plant of slow growth in an aged bosom; but when it takes root, it takes it pretty deeply. Nothing ever can or shall make me think you in the wrong about anything, and you might have known that by this time."

"How good you are. Then my letter must have miscarried?"

"Yes, my love. I have no doubt that I know where it is, but I should like to be certain. Was that the girl to whom you gave it—the one who showed me in? It was?" And he rang the bell. The same domestic appeared.

"A nice thing you've done for yourself, young woman," said Mr. Keckling, in a voice of affected harshness. "That was bad money which the gentleman in the other room gave you for this lady's letter;—you remember, I see, and I am a detective policeman. Passing bad money is transportation, girl," he added still more sternly.

"But—but I haven't passed it," stammered the girl, thrown off her guard.

"Not passed it?" thundered Mr. Keckling.

"No, sir; no, on my Bible hoath I haven't. It's in my box now."

"What is—the crown piece?" said Mr. Keckling, at a venture.

"Ah, don't lay traps for me, sir: I'm only a poor girl—you know it was only half-a-crown. I'll fetch it if you like, sir."

"The half-crown given you by Mr. Spencer, when he took this lady's letter."

"He said he would take it to the post."

"And you were to say that you had done it?"

"The lady never asked me the question, sir. Ask her if she did."

"No, I did not," said Margaret. "I never thought of being deceived."

"Servants always deceive you," said Mr. Keckling. "Here this girl sells your letter, which might have been life and death, for half-a-crown; and I dare say for half-a-sovereign she would have put ratsbane into your baby's food."

"Lord G—Almighty!" shrieked out the girl, in horror and indignation, "I wonder the floor don't open and swallow yer up for saying such a dreadful wicked thing. I hurt an apple of that dear babe's eyes! Why, I love him like my own little brother that's at Horsham. Ask his nurse if I didn't run out in the rain to buy him saveloy-cakes, and would again. I think you must be a very bad man."

The explosion was so perfectly natural, and the girl so evidently spoke from her heart, that Margaret began to cry, and Keckling to laugh.

"Well, you have done dreadful mischief as it is," said Mr. Keckling, "but I believe you did not mean it. But you mind, and if you have letters given you again, never part with them. You may go."

And she went, but in a most excessive rage, deeming herself the injured party, and cut to the very heart at the allusion to the child, for whom she, like most people who came near him, had formed a very honest attachment. It was difficult to get a bell answered in the house for the rest of that day.

"Your father, you see, was afraid of your communicating with me," said Mr. Keckling.

"Not precisely afraid," said a gentlemanly voice, "but he thought that, for several reasons, the present interview should be delayed."

And Mr. Armandale Spencer, who had glided into the room unperceived, as the servant left it, bowed pleasantly to Mr. Keckling, and sat down upon the sofa beside Margaret, affectionately taking one of her hands in his fatherly clasp, and retaining it.

Keckling had in some measure primed himself for the encounter with Spencer, but had not calculated on its being begun in so very

quiet a manner. Mr. Spencer's assurance put him into a rage, and as he had a *casus belli* in the detaining a letter belonging to himself, he hastened to pour in a volley.

"What did you mean, Mr. Spencer, by keeping a letter that was intended for me?"

"Aware, my dear Mr. Keckling, of the delicate stratagem by which you have arrived at the knowledge of the fact, I almost wonder that your keenness does not lead you to a solution of the problem you have just put to me. Does it not occur to you that what I meant by keeping the letter was to prevent its being received by you?"

"And how dared you take my letter? I would say, but for the presence of Mrs. Arundel, how dared——"

"I steal your letter?"

Keckling nodded savagely.

"I am glad, then, that the presence of my beloved child saves you from making a blunder. The letter, you observe, had not become yours; and even had I taken it from the Post-office, the theft would not have been from you, but from the Postmaster-General, whose property a posted letter becomes. It is impossible to be too accurate in making a criminal charge."

"I dare say you have known, or will know, a good deal about such charges," said Keckling, losing all remains of temper.

Armandale Spencer rose, and said with some dignity—

"You must feel, Mr. Keckling, that this room is no place for such remarks. There is the door."

But Keckling not moving, Spencer, after a pause, said—

"We are both old men, Mr. Keckling; and though I have the advantage in personal strength, owing to my temperate and active habits, while you have become obese from self-indulgence, and therefore I could probably put you through that window with little difficulty, any such combat between us would be as ridiculous as that of Peachum and Lockit, whom we resemble in character a good deal."

"Don't say that to me, sir," said Keckling.

"But really, my dear Mr. Keckling," returned the other, "for a very clever man, you are curiously afraid of hearing the truth. It is said to be characteristic of real talent to like to hear it. Now, you and I are travelled men—men of the world; we have respectively pushed our fortunes according to our abilities, you going in for roubles and I for rupees, and both of us employing such means of success as were most efficient. You have a hundred times bribed an official into letting you into a lucrative contract, and I in my poor way have managed a native, and made him see merits in me which he would do well to reward. We have not been moral men, Keckling; but we have been lucky men, who knew how to take the world as we found it."

The fault of this charming address, intended, perhaps, to be exasperating, was, that being rather too long, it gave Mr. Keckling time to regain his self-possession, and to remember that he must lose in any contest with such a man as Armandale Spencer. So he allowed the other to finish his insulting speech, and then replied with tolerable calmness—

"In one respect I agree with you, Mr. Spencer—namely, that we



*Virginius on Guard.*





shall do well to avoid violence of any kind. I was wrong to express myself angrily at *your* detaining my letter."

Despite his endeavours, Mr. Keckling could not keep a little emphasis from falling upon the word, and turning a civil speech into a bitter sneer. The tongue is indeed at times "an unruly evil, and full of deadly poison." But Armandale Spencer refused to accept the taunt.

"I have nothing more to say, sir, after that frank avowal that a father's effort for his child's welfare should not be judged by the rules of mere every-day etiquette. In the same spirit of frankness I hand you the letter, which you will observe I have opened, and which I inform you that I read."

Margaret looked up indignantly, and would have withdrawn her hand; but her father held it with so determined a grasp that she could not release it save by a struggle.

Mr. Keckling took the letter with a bow, and placed it in his pocket-book.

"We may talk as men of business," he said.

"Assuredly, my dear sir; and I would suggest that one first point should be your explaining your business in Mrs. Arundel's apartment."

"That is rather beyond your range, Mr. Spencer. I address myself to a friend, who happens to be a married lady, and of course decides who shall or shall not be her visitors. The blunder is, however, excusable, considering your Oriental habits."

"Mrs. Arundel, having left her husband, and placed herself under the protection of her father, will be guided by him, sir, in the selection of her acquaintances," said Spencer, grinding his teeth.

"You force me into a corner, Mr. Spencer," said Keckling, seeing his advantage, "and that, I believe, you diplomatic gentlemen don't consider the high game. You know the answer which, if you persist in your last remark, I *must* make to it."

"Make it, sir, that we may quite understand one another."

"We do so already, Mr. Spencer, and there is no propriety in paining Mrs. Arundel by the use of harsh language in her presence. I must, however, decline to concede that Mrs. Arundel is in your society by her own choice, any more——" he paused.

"Any more, sir? Pray finish. Have no apprehension."

"Any more, sir, than any other respectable person, aware of your—your merits, could be."

"There is nothing like being explicit, Mr. Keckling."

"On that point I was sure you would agree with me, Mr. Spencer."

They still held off a little, as fencers make appeals, beats on blade, and other tentatives.

Margaret managed to withdraw her hand from her father's, and said, rising, that she must go up-stairs to her child. His grandfather, with an indulgent smile, said that her doing so was needless, as, from the window, he saw Duke and his nurse at a distance, which happened to be the fact.

"You are naturally desirous to escape this conversation, Mrs. Arundel," said Mr. Keckling; "and I wish that you could do so. It

is not I who seek to make you remain, to hear what you must be so unwilling to hear."

"Which, therefore, throws that painful responsibility on me," said Armandale Spencer; "and, believe me, I accept it with sincere sorrow. But to make matters as agreeable as is consistent with business, I think I may say that we all know pretty well why this delightful meeting takes place. Mr. Keckling is tolerably nearly aware why I have sought the companionship of my dear child, and I do not imagine that I deceive myself as to the motive which has brought him to Hastings."

"If you do I will undeceive you at once, sir. It is to end that companionship as speedily as possible."

"Of course," replied Spencer. "And the means?"

"May I presume that an appeal to your fatherly feelings, a reference to the cruel embarrassment in which you wantonly involve your daughter, will not be without avail?"

"The presumption would be a pardonable one. But a similar appeal has been made to me by Mrs. Arundel herself, and it would be insulting to her to recognise in a stranger's argument the force I could not see in the same reasoning by my beloved child."

"Then, if you will not leave her, she shall leave you."

"You grow peremptory, Mr. Keckling, and it is something early to become so. If Mrs. Arundel pleases, I will, in deference to a look from her, retire to my own room, and remain there until she has removed from the house."

"And then——"

"Pardon me if I say that my own course—though I should be proud to take your advice upon it—is not to be submitted to your dictation."

The advice Keckling burned to tender was, that Spencer should go to the toy-shop over the way, and, once more to quote the Laureat,

Take a skipping-rope,  
And hang himself thereby.

But this was not counsel to be proffered under the circumstances.

"You mean, Mr. Spencer, that you will renew your persecution of Mrs. Arundel in some other way. You may as well speak out."

"When I have an object in view, my dear Mr. Keckling, I usually accomplish it. I may, in deference to the wishes of others, abandon any special means which I may have selected, but I adopt others, and, as I said, I succeed."

"It would be satisfactory to me, Mr. Spencer, if you saw your way to an arrangement that should spare us the chance of any future interviews of this kind. We can afford to speak very frankly to one another. You know perfectly well that I can have no interest in your welfare, except as it is connected with Mrs. Arundel. But you have also, of course, learned that I care sufficiently about her to make a sacrifice for her benefit. Why not name that sacrifice, and let me see if I can meet you?"

"I am obliged by your candour, sir. I am, I dare say, right in

saying, that if, by our mutual arrangement, I should retire to my room, and put a pistol to my head, you would, the moment after hearing the report, draw a cheque for a couple of thousand guineas, and enclose it to my executors."

Mr. Keckling has since said that he believes he felt, involuntarily, at his breast-pocket to know if his cheque-book were there, he was so pleased at the idea thus presented to him.

"You don't deny it," said Armandale, laughing. "I am not prepared, however, to negotiate on such a basis. I have never quite satisfied my conscience that what Cato did and Addison did not approve is justifiable under any ordinary circumstances. Waiving the religious aspect of the question, however, I am not inclined, even for so handsome a *douceur*, to press advantages which I believe I see before me. Let me say that the handsomeness of the sum increases my conviction that I have an excellent market to resort to."

"I name no sum as the price of your ceasing to annoy your child, sir. Money, however, should not stand in your way; and, supposing that the influence of myself, or of other friends of hers, could procure for you a colonial appointment,——"

"I should be compelled to decline it. My health is good, and I am promised a long lease of life in this climate; but I must not exchange it for a warmer one."

"You will, one of these days," muttered Calvinistic Keckling.

"We might find you something in Ireland, or in France, conditionally,——"

"The accent of Ireland is detestable to me, and so are the morals of France. I regret that my attachment to my dear native country should be so offensive to you and your friends, sir, but I feel that it is not to be eradicated."

"I think I have now earned the right to ask you to name your own terms."

"I really see no ground on which you can ask it. You wish to buy of me something which I don't desire to sell. I will listen to your biddings, but I am not disposed to ticket my goods."

Mr. Keckling was beginning to lose patience and temper again.

"You have learned this kind of evasive talk among those scoundrels in the East," he said; "but at the same time you have forgotten that it does not suit us here."

"I am aware that Mr. Keckling has long been naturalized in Russia; in which happy region everybody is corruptible, and where there is a tariff for everything, from the broken head of a cabman to the honour of a wife."

At these last words of all, Keckling uttered an ironical laugh, and whispered something in Spencer's ear. Armandale suddenly turned white with rage, and, with a furious gesture, as it were, brushed away Keckling from him, exclaiming, violently—

"You are a dastardly old liar, sir—a dastardly old liar."

Keckling rushed to the door, opened it, and signed to Margaret to withdraw. She rose to obey, but the infuriated Armandale caught her wrist, and said—

"No, stay, young lady, and learn with what kind of ruffian you

are willing to live for the sake of his money and his luxuries. That man has just dared to say to your father, in the room where you, his child, are——”

“Spencer,” exclaimed Keckling, “an instant. She knows much of your character, but she does not know your crowning shame. She does not know it, I tell you. If she learns it, remember, it is from your own lips.”

“Hold your tongue, sir,” cried Armandale, with a savage oath. “It is *your* character that is to be shown up.”

Keckling’s agitation for Margaret’s sake was great, and in his anxiety to stay the tongue of Armandale, he spoke thickly and hurriedly—

“Remember, remember,” he said, “Mr. Spencer, I know what I said; I know what I am saying. Before you—before you utter another word, think of this. I told you something just now in your ear. I have—listen—I have written documents to prove it—letters which you know.”

And he pointed at Armandale Spencer with a menacing finger.

Spencer’s eyes flamed like those of an enraged tiger-cat, but his face became whiter, and there were the signs of discomfiture in the relaxing muscles of the jaw. He was about to speak, when Keckling repeated, sternly—

“Letters which you know.”

The father’s hand loosed its hold of the daughter’s wrist, and Margaret, with an appealing look of infinite terror, directed at Mr. Keckling, obeyed his sign, and fled from the room. Armandale’s eyes followed her for the moment during which she was in sight, and then Spencer, exercising a sudden self-mastery, quietly closed the door.

He then turned to the Russian merchant—

“You take the trick this time, Mr. Keckling.”

“Honours don’t count, anyhow,” returned Keckling, scoffingly. He did not care what he said, now that his pet, Margaret, was not in the room to be pained and grieved.

“True. But you have not won the game.”

“Damn the game, sir,” cried Keckling, relieving his mind with the comminative phrase. “Don’t talk of games, sir. We play games with honest and honourable men, who win or lose fairly, not with rascally gamblers. By Jove, what a scoundrel you are! Don’t look at me like that, because I permitted your damned swagger rather than pain Mrs. Arundel; for, if you come near me, I’ll dash my fist in your face.”

And the sturdy old man looked as if his blow, which would certainly have been given with his whole heart, might be a damaging hit.

“A fellow,” pursued Keckling, “who trades on his own bad name, and forces his own daughter to hawk about the article for sale.”

“And means to have it sold well, mind that,” responded Spencer, in a brutal tone, utterly unlike the silken softness in which he had enfolded his earlier verbiage.

“I make no doubt of it,” said Keckling, “if the hangman don’t spoil the market. Well, are we to deal?”

"You don't mind doing that, then?"

"Certainly not. It is a rule of commerce that if the devil has an article to sell which I want to buy, I am not to be blamed for dealing with him, so long as our connexion is only one of business."

"And this is a parallel case."

"No; be hanged if it is. 'The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman,' as the chap says in the play. But shall we deal?"

"You offer nothing."

"The deuce I don't! A colonial appointment and a lump of money, and that to a man whose character is so bad that he hasn't a chance."

"That is the rock on which you split, Mr. Keckling. I have every chance, including one of which you know nothing. Why should I transport myself?"

"Indeed," said Keckling, "I am heartily sorry that the proceeding should be voluntary. But so it is; and really for what you are offered, and which can only be got by putting the screw upon certain high people, there are thousands of honest men who would fall on their knees and bless the Almighty for his goodness."

"My religion is not so demonstrative," said Armandale, with something of his soft manner. "Besides, if Providence has given me the talent to convert even the misfortunes with which He has been pleased to visit me to my benefit, and to my enjoyment of his special bounties, it would be atheistic to neglect my advantages. In short," he said, suddenly returning to his coarser tone, "I know what I'm about, and I don't think you'll turn me from it."

"I think I shall."

"Well, you are desperately in earnest about it, certainly, which shows me the strength of my game."

"Bah," said Keckling, "we know that you are not a fool, and that you see the infernal value of your character as well as we do. You know that your daughter is dear to a good many people here, and has married into a first-class family of honourable men and virtuous women, and therefore that we would do a great deal to keep your existence, which, as you so proudly and so truly say, is a contamination, out of sight and scent. We give you credit for being perfectly alive to all that. Don't you push matters too far, though."

"Threaten me, eh?" And he smiled, almost benevolently.

"Not I. But I would deal with you, if I could; and I tell you fairly, that, if I can't deal, I shall defy you."

"That would be very wise."

"I am not sure that it would not be wise to do so at once; but we will try the other course first. Remember, therefore, that, if you will come to terms, and take yourself off for good and all, until it shall please the devil to take you finally off to where you will be better appreciated, well and good, if one may use such words in such a case. If you don't, remember this—that your abominable article is good for sale only while sale means preventing its being known. To speak plainly, when once the mischief is done, and you have wounded your daughter's heart, and shocked her friends with the disclosure, the sooner you hang yourself the better. There will be no more offers

then, and, on the contrary, you will be kicked from every door you knock at. You know best whether you have provided against having to make your last knock at the door of the workhouse."

"A well and boldly-drawn picture, Mr. Keckling; the effect not weakened by any hesitation as to the colouring."

"Think over it, that's all."

"Not quite all. You fancy that you have seen my whole hand of cards."

"My good fellow—God forgive me for the word—one has seen the trick of mystery and mystification too often to be gulled by pretended secrets."

"Don't be so hasty. I intend neither mystery nor secret—I mean to tell you everything that I design. I advised Mr. Marmaduke Arundel, member of Parliament, to invite his son's father-in-law to dinner. He refused. Next time I wish to come, you will be among the first to recommend him to send me an invitation."

"I *may*—and the stars may fall."

"You will, Mr. Keckling; and you will show your good sense by so doing. You all are, or profess to be, exceedingly fond of my child Margaret."

"Damn it, man, call her Mrs. Arundel," said Keckling, contemptuously.

"That is, perhaps, more to the purpose," said Spencer, unabashed at the bitter taunt. "You, and the Arundels, and the Scotch woman who married old M'Cullombich for very good reasons of her own——"

"Keep your scandals to yourself."

"Well, you all love Margaret, Mrs. Philip Arundel."

"Of course we do, and therefore hate *you*. Get on."

"You ought to love her. You have seen her in various capacities: as girl, wife, and mother, doing her duty in a way which must have charmed you all. You have not had much opportunity of witnessing her discharge of her duty as a daughter—circumstances have not yet been favourable—but the pleasure is in store for you, and will be enjoyed before long."

Mr. Keckling simply growled the wrath he could not so conveniently clothe in words.

"Suppose," continued Spencer, "a yet gentler and sweeter happiness is in store for Margaret and for you all?"

He paused, but Keckling was silent, listening sternly.

"Suppose you beheld her clasped to the heart of a penitent and affectionate mother?"

"Scoundrel, you *would* not ——"

"Would I not," replied Armandale, fiercely; "and why not? What mercy have any of you a right to ask of me, to whom you would show so much? Do you think that I will stand on terms now? I have *that* card in my hand, and by heaven I will play it, if need. I can at any moment produce that woman—that harlot—the mother of Margaret, the mother-in-law of Mr. Philip Arundel. Do you think that she would be more welcome than myself in Thanington-square?"

He suddenly opened the door, and seemed mortified.

"You hoped *she* was listening, did you?" hinted Keckling.

"I thought it likely," said Armaudale, "from my knowledge of women. But it is of no consequence. You will tell her what I have said, I know. I shall return to London to-night. You will always find me at Half-Moon-street; you know the address, or your spy Earnshaw can give it you."

"I have seen much vileness," said Mr. Keckling, "at home and abroad; but I find that I have never sounded the real depths of iniquity."

"There is not the least doubt," said the other, "that you, my dear Mr. Keckling, are a very well-meaning man, but a very great ass. Since we are to be frank, own that you are no match for me."

"Yet," said Keckling, rising and confronting Spencer, "a word from me a little while ago dashed you into silence, if not into shame. You did in India that which you could not bear to be told of in England; but which shall be told, if you make it necessary, wherever your name is mentioned. Shall I send you copies of the documents to Half-Moon-street?"

"They prove little," said Spencer, sullenly.

"They prove that the man who would now sell his child's happiness, formerly sold his wife's honour."

"It is a lie!" said the conscience-stricken Armandale, alternately pale and flushing; "but it has nothing to do with our business. If you have any offer to make me, you are a cursed fool to bring up that kind of thing. Mind what you are after."

And the man left the room with as near an approach to a skulk as one who had so long studied the graces of manner could well display. He had been beaten out by the old merchant. Honesty had for once triumphed over impudent villany.

Was it so?

When Keckling, eager to save Margaret from the shame that awaited her, menaced Spencer with the production of the letters, the thought was an inspiration to save the poor girl.

Keckling had no knowledge that any such letters were in existence. He knew what was said in Calcutta at the time of Mrs. Armandale Spencer's elopement, and he risked the declaration, hastily speculating on a possibility, and, at all events, delaying the exposure.

But, in reference to the affair with which, in his own mind, he connected the documents, no such letters had ever been in existence. Armandale's conscience had affixed another meaning to Keckling's words, and the lie, shot at one mark, had missed it, and "made gold" in another. Keckling had lied, that is the fact, so far as he knew. But he was not penitent; and, on the contrary, indulged in some little triumph at the expense of the man who had insulted him throughout the interview. And then he found time to turn his attention to Margaret.

The scene between them—though scene is hardly the word, where sorrow and agitation on one side, and soothing kindness and suggestion on the other, were so real, and so apart from the exaggerated demonstrations in which it is a part (the principal part) of the religion of some folks to indulge—was naturally distressing. It is not necessary to detail what is already known. Margaret had to explain

not only her acquaintance with her father, but her separation from her husband, and all her griefs were poured into the sympathizing ear of her old friend, who felt her more and more endeared to him—as is ever the case—by the storm he had gone through for her sake. He was glad to be able to apprise her that for the moment she was freed from her father's *surveillance*; and it may easily be imagined that Mr. Keckling did not inform her of the last stroke of Spencer's wicked ingenuity. It required but little eloquence on the part of Mr. Keckling to persuade Mrs. Arundel to leave her present abode, but it needed much more to induce her to return to London. Amid all her own sorrow and trouble her child's welfare was ever present to her, and she had been ordered to the sea for the benefit of Duke. It seemed so very important to Mr. Keckling that Margaret should be completely removed from the sphere of Spencer's influences, that he sunk all minor considerations; and finding that she was resolute in her affectionate care for the child, he was at last compelled to have recourse to stratagem. Again, I regret to record it, but such are the tortuous ways of that philanthropist, who had studied in Russia, Mr. Keckling employed falsehood. Such accounts were brought by him and by his contrivance, of the recent appearance of scarlet fever in Hastings, and of its malignant ravages among the children there, facts of which, as Mr. Keckling justly said, Mr. Alban Cheriton could not have been aware when he recommended the place, that Margaret was but too ready to depart from so dangerous a locality, and the doubly triumphant Keckling left Hastings next day, having defeated the father and carried off the daughter.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE LECTURER.

ALBAN CHERITON was at this time in the full tide of an honourable career. His talents, as has been seen, were speedily and fully recognised by his professional associates; and he had distinguished himself by some boldly and brilliantly written papers upon topics connected with his profession, some of which papers had secured the attention of the very first men in it, and had procured him especial notice and compliment. The private practice in which he had undertaken to co-operate rapidly expanded under his hand, and his partner, a weaker, but an amiable and honourable man, had insisted upon Alban's participation in the profits of the business being more in accordance with the value of his services than their original arrangement would have made it. He was therefore prospering, in a pecuniary sense, and making a mark for himself before the public and the profession.

Lecturing had been rather a favourite pursuit of Alban's. It suited the somewhat wilful, not to say dictatorial, habit of his mind to deliver his thoughts in a form that enabled him to insist upon certain points



being assumed, elaborate proof being impossible in the compass of a discourse, and to invest such parts of his theme as he specially preferred, with the wealth of his illustrations—a treatment in which he was peculiarly fortunate. Not, be it said, that Alban used flowery language, or even culled metaphor from fields too distant for the journey of the ordinary and practical mind. Nobody listened with a loftier contempt than Alban when any of his fellows assumed a sentimental tone, or indulged in bombastic oratory. But his large and minute acquaintance with the economy of creation, and the patient study which he had been accustomed to give to the sciences, enabled him at once to startle, to delight, and to instruct his hearers by the riches of his researches, aptly produced at the very moment when they were required, and so presented that they welded themselves with the truth he sought to establish, and the two became inseparable thenceforth and for ever in the mind of the hearer. No wonder, therefore, that Alban, with his acuteness of thought for the older, and his pregnant illustration for the younger devotee of the profession, enjoyed a respect and a popularity which was deserved and envied.

It was noted that, about the time in which we have recently spoken, a certain change came over the manner and the matter of the lecturer. It was at first gradual, but soon became so marked, that none who had known him in his earlier days could fail to appreciate it. The manner of Alban became bolder, almost to offence, and his propositions were advanced with an air of challenge, seldom modest, and sometimes unpleasantly defiant. The older men were vexed, and assigned a natural and commonplace cause for the change, in supposing that Mr. Cheriton's success had turned his head a little, and that his arrogance was the result. They hoped, therefore, that time and thought would tame him down; and in the meantime they did not frequent his lectures as before. But the defection of the elders was more than compensated for by the increased attraction which the addresses offered to the younger men. It was not the dictatorial propositions, nor the fiery challenges that brought them, but strange bursts of eloquence, which had superseded the severer and more analytical part of Alban's orations. The speaker seemed to have found a new gift, and he poured out his language, eloquent and glowing, in a way which excited and charmed the minds of the young disciples; youths by no means ready to yield to mere frothy talk, but whose wits speedily discovered that, whether or not their instructors were talking wisely, he was assuredly talking splendidly. Alban declaimed upon the wonders he had before been content to point out, and as he brought the secrets of science before his hearers, and illuminated each mystery with the glow of his eloquence, pausing at no paradox, and hesitating at no audacity, the fascinations of his discourse became stronger and stronger. Topics habitually abstained from in such essays the lecturer boldly dragged forward, and he would sometimes make even the boldest thinkers around him look astonished, when, taking some phenomenon in nature, or some structural miracle of the human frame, he would refuse to it the admiration which it had been the habit of older and better men to bestow, and would daringly intimate his conviction that censure upon its

cruelty or upon its inadequacy were the more befitting comment. Sometimes a murmur of dissent from an orthodoxly educated lad would strike his ear. Then Alban's dark cheek would flush, his lip take a sneer, he would launch a keen sarcasm or two upon the dissentient, and then rush into a full tide of ironical adoration of the wisdom of the scheme of creation, and of reprobation of those who saw, in our weaknesses, diseases, wars, wickedness, and misery, the least reason for doubting that everything was directed by Almighty benevolence and love. Nor was this all. He would startle and dismay by his irreverence, but he would at times awaken another and almost as unbefitting a train of sensation, when a professional theme gave him the hint, or when it suited his whim dexterously to extort a hint from some subject assuredly not promising such fruit; and Alban would delight in allusions more coarse, but all the more mischievous from their delicacy and warmth, to the passion of love, and to its innumerable and mystic influences upon the frame. The topic gradually intruded itself so frequently, that even the students at the lectures, young men of a not very fastidious class, used sometimes to think that Mr. Cheriton might reserve some of his illustrations. But the mingled power and grace with which he usually dealt, even with a dangerous theme, worked its own success; and Alban's lectures were more than ever attractive. It was also noted by two or three closer observers, that when Cheriton had trespassed unusually near the bounds that separate investigation from voluptuousness, that night he was as unusually liberal with his scoff and sarcasm against the pretended perfection of creation, and the hint that roused those rows of eager listeners to unholy thought on the pleasures of the senses, was followed by a rude shock, a semi-blasphemous taunt directed against the Goodness that, while giving to man the faculty of passion, has given him the intellect that forbids him to be passion's slave.

Alban, as he had told Mr. Keckling, had a surgical operation to perform, and he executed it with a brilliancy which elicited plaudits from the spectators, as the pale and dismembered patient, scarcely awakening from the all-merciful anæsthetic, was borne from the table. But the still more powerful detaining cause that prevented Alban's departure was his engagement to deliver one of the addresses that have been described. And never had he been in fuller and more baneful force—never had the torrent of his eloquence rushed in more strength—never had Alban trodden more recklessly upon dangerous ground, or offered more mischievous texts to tempt or to mislead his hearers. Specially adroit was the sophistry with which that night he sought to show that an average of what is called crime was—as testified by statistics—a necessity in society; and that the conditions under which man lived, and the passions implanted, so mysteriously, in his nature, rendered it impossible that he should invariably conform to laws based on a so-called theology rather than on the teachings of philosophy.

He had one more auditor that night than he imagined, and as he passed from the lecture-table to an adjoining room, he encountered his father.

"All is well, I trust, at St. Oscars," said Alban.

"All would be well, but for the disturbing news you sent us. That has brought me up. Have you anything to add to it?"

"Mrs. Arundel is at Hastings. I intend to go there to-morrow."

"You intend to go!" repeated his father, thoughtfully.

"Her old friend, Mr. Keckling, has started to-night, and I should have accompanied him, but for having this lecture."

"I do not know that you would have done good at Hastings, but I wish that you had gone."

"Mr. Keckling will say all that should be said."

"I do not mean that I wish it on Margaret's account, but on your own, and that of all these poor young fellows, to whom you have been retailing worse poison than they could find in this laboratory."

"You know that my views, on some matters, my dear father, are not your own, but give me credit for being honest."

"I do not. I have never asked you to affect belief in things which are the happiness of my life and that of your mother. I never, after you became of age to judge for yourself, asked your conformity to our religious habits and observances. Your hours were your own, your Sabbaths were your own. I often prayed for you; I never judged you. To-night you have humbled me. I took a pride—perhaps too much—in your intellect, and I did not murmur at your grappling, in fearlessness and in earnestness, with mysteries which many of us accept in love and trust from those who teach us. But I never thought to find you perverting and prostituting your fine talents, and, for the sake of the applause of a mob of boys, uttering with pretended approbation the shallownesses and tawdry sophistries I have heard to-night. When my boy Alban was twenty, he would have torn into atoms, and with scorn and contempt, the trash my son Alban, in the vigour of manhood, has not been ashamed to parade to-night. You have humbled me, Alban. But we will talk no more of this until the duty next to our hand is done. What is your cousin's address at Hastings?"

"Horley-place, or Terrace—I forget; but I have it at home. Will you write to her?"

"No, I will go to her. If she is to have a home other than her husband's, the fitting place is the home of her childhood."

"You will take her to St. Oscars, to my mother—to Bertha?" asked Alban, in an undertone of disquiet.

"Look me straight in the face, Alban," said his father.

It was a simple request, and in Alban's early life, when the father loved to gaze on the broad brow and bright eye of his first-born child, it was often made, and instantly obeyed. Strange that now, when they spoke as equals, when the younger man had fairly fought up his way in the world, and had acquired the right to look proudly to his father, as a son looks who has not been unworthy of his sire, the fine face of Alban was clouded, and it was with an effort and a sort of murmur that he fixed his eyes, not on his father's, but on a lower part of the face of the latter.

The elder Cheriton turned ghastly pale.

"Alban," he exclaimed, in a voice of intense pain. "Alban, look at me. Look into my eyes, Alban."

But he would not. He turned away, affected to busy himself with some trifle in the room, and made a remark about the gas being about to be turned off.

His father gazed at him long and earnestly. Henry Cheriton's lips worked convulsively, and once or twice parted as if forming words. He might have been praying that a trial too awful, as he might well think it, for endurance, might be spared him, or that he might have strength to bear it.

"Let us go to your house," he said, after a long pause. "I want your cousin's address to-night."

And they went away together, the brilliant lecturer, and the sorrow-stricken father.

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The same night another person in our story was strangely called to account for his deeds.

Claxton and Philip Arundel had been together at some place of amusement; had supped, and returned to their chambers in the Temple. Chambers, as those who have inhabited them know, can be made the most pleasant places in the world, but the entrance to them is seldom cheerful, and at night the solemn black door, through which in darkness you enter your black and lonesome rooms—away from all neighbourly sound, and without the myriad comforts of a home where woman dwelleth, is a doleful, not to say funereal thing. Companionship, however, destroyed much of this effect for our young fellows, and Claxton was certainly singing a recollection of an opera, and Philip, I am sorry to add, whistling an accompaniment, as the former's latchkey bid the yawning entrance disclose itself. The room was without light, save the rays that glimmered up from a gas lamp in the Temple, and the master of the apartments hastened to a handily-placed box in which he kept his lucifer-matches. As he lit the candle, he was surprised to hear Philip, who was behind him, exclaim—

"The devil!"

But Claxton, who piqued himself on—among other trifles—never being discomposed, calmly replied—

"Show him in."

Turning round, he beheld his friend in the clutch of a female, decently, but rather curiously, dressed—her costume being that of an Englishwoman of humble life, save her head-dress, which covered her head and fell down her back, and was Oriental. Her dark skin looked almost black in the half-lighted room, and her eyes glittered like those of a cat.

It was the ayah, Boosey, who had come up from St. Oscars. The faithful old creature had scented out that there was something wrong with her darling child, and had tracked her husband to his lair. She held him with a firm grasp, and cried,—

"What you done with Miss Maggie?"



*"Where no Virgin"*



## CHAPTER XL.

## ITHURIEL.

MISERABLE indeed was the night passed by Henry Cheriton after the lecture. The brave, strong, good man bowed himself down under a weight which, at certain dark moments, he felt unable to bear, while even the strength that in his hours of sorrow he had been accustomed to seek elsewhere, seemed to his stricken and despairing heart to be withheld, or but scantily to aid him in bearing his terrible burden.

And with the earthly friend to whom from the day that had made them one he had been accustomed to turn with all his joys, and with such subtle sorrows as his own gallant nature could not, single-handed, overmaster, he could not now take counsel and solace. Cheriton shuddered (with that sickening terror known only to those who have loved deeply, and have seen sudden grief come upon the faces of those they have loved) from the thought of sharing with his wife the secret that had glanced to his soul from the eyes of Alban.

He desired that a room might be prepared for him in the house where his son resided, and few words passed between them on retiring to rest. Alban seemed eager to separate from his father, and on the plea of a heavy day's work performed, and another to come, he speedily left Mr. Cheriton, slightly touching his hand on leaving the room. The father heard Alban's door locked and double-locked, and to Cheriton's ear, rendered perhaps over-sensitive by excitement, this seemed to be done in a certain deliberate and noisy manner, as if to signify that Alban was not to be intruded upon. But this idea may have been but a fancy.

Cheriton passed the night, as has been said, in misery. How often he sprang up from his sleepless bed, to listen at Alban's door, to hold his own breath while seeking to hear the breathing of his son, to watch, when any accidental sound came to his ear, whether Alban had been disturbed by it, let the parent say who has tended the sick slumbers of a child. Let the mother say, for the heart of Henry Cheriton loved with almost a feminine love.

Yet the watcher was mocked. Alban never rested in that bed at all. After retiring, he allowed some time to elapse, during which his father might suppose him undressing, and he permitted some quarter of an hour more to elapse, after which he knew that Cheriton would not disturb the sleep he would believe had come. Then Alban rose, and left his room by the window, which opened on a balcony, whence he passed into another apartment, and noiselessly descended the stairs. Henry Cheriton was watching, with a throbbing heart, at his son's door, when Alban was many a mile away, trampling in lonely fields, amid grass wet with the night-dew.

In the morning, when, at an hour much later than it was Alban's custom to rise, all attempts to obtain an answer from his room failed, the open windows told their own story.

By the morning delivery came a letter for Alban, with the Hastings post-mark. Cheriton opened it, and found that it was from Mr. Keckling, who briefly apprized Alban that his cousin was with her old friend, and would immediately return to London. The words conveyed little meaning to the heart-broken father beyond a sensation that he was relieved of a duty which he had felt himself about to neglect.

Margaret was once more the honoured and petted guest of Mr. Keckling, in fact the mistress of his house. It was her wish, and in that house her wish was law, that she should remain in complete privacy. Poor girl, from the first moment of agony in which she had discovered that her husband's heart had once been another's, until her return to the quietude of Mr. Keckling's residence, she had had but little time to realize her own situation. The miserable episode of her becoming acquainted with her father, and their still more miserable separation, had so perturbed the sorrowful under-current of feeling that some leisure was needed for the troubled waters to clear—to clear only that they might become Marah—bitterness.

She was alone with her child, her companion by day and by night, when the drawing-room door was opened quietly, and, unannounced, her cousin Alban stood before her.

Their last interview had been on the day when he came up to the house then her own, and had advised her taking little Duke to the sea-side. Actually, this was but a short time back, but what had marked the intervening period made it an age for Margaret. She had lost a husband, she had gained a father. As for Alban, at this period of his life, he took little count of time.

"You did not expect me," he said, sitting down without taking her hand.

"No, indeed," said Margaret, in some agitation, she hardly knew why.

"I saw the blinds up, and other signs that the house was inhabited, so I came in on the chance of hearing of you."

"Mr. Keckling wrote to you that we were coming up from Hastings," said Margaret, collecting her memories.

"Did he?" said Alban, carelessly. "The boy looks better."

"You think so?" asked Margaret, anxiously. "He seems very well. We were frightened away from Hastings by the scarlet fever."

"Some people are easily frightened," replied Alban, with a little, odd laugh, which sounded almost rudely. "Not that you are one of those," he added. "No, no; you are brave and courageous."

"I thought so once," said Mrs. Arundel, with a faint smile; "but we none of us know what we are until we are tried."

"A new remark, embodying a profound physiological discovery," said her cousin, in the same abrupt and nearly rude manner. "Have you seen my father?"

"No," said Margaret, flushing with varied emotions at the idea of meeting her uncle, the friend of her youth, her kindly adviser. "Is he in town?"



"I don't know. Am I my father's keeper?"

She gazed at him with much astonishment. She had seen him both calmly sarcastic and impassioned even to violence, but he had never before worn in her presence the unpleasant manner he then displayed.

"What made you ask me whether I had seen my uncle?" she rejoined.

"I supposed he would have been here," said Alban, almost angrily. He came up from St. Oscars to get your address from me. I don't know what he wanted to say to you, of course—how should I?"

"I know," said poor Margaret, gently.

"No, you don't," replied her cousin, suddenly turning on her, and answering sharply.

She did not speak, and he broke out again.

"I don't advise you to see him. He is a good man, as you know, as I know, as everybody knows. Of course he is a good man, uncommonly, extraordinarily good. But he sees matters by his own lights only, and they throw a queer colour upon some things, a very queer colour; and then he talks less pleasantly than ladies like to be talked to."

"O Alban! that you should say so. Where is he staying? Please give me his address. I hope you gave him mine."

"Yes, I did," said Alban; "and if he has not been to see you, it is for reasons of his own—reasons you may not like perhaps, and very likely you will not, but there they are."

"Alban, is it my imagination—if it is, I know you will forgive me, for I have had much trouble—but you seem to speak in a tone you have never been accustomed to use to me."

"I dare say. We all change. It is a world of changes, and we must be accustomed to them. You're a pious young person, and have been taught all that. Troubles! we all have our troubles. Do you think I have no troubles?"

"I hoped that you had not many," said Margaret, still gently. "I understood that you were very prosperous, and I have often seen your great talents praised in the newspapers. I supposed that you were on the high road to all that success can give you."

"You have improved, Margaret. Good society has not been lost upon you. No woman of the world could have spoken more properly, or more falsely."

"Alban!" exclaimed Margaret, rather grieved than angry at the insult.

"Falsely," he repeated with a sort of snap. "O, I am not a member of good society, so you must excuse my want of courtliness. I dare say that you never heard such a word from Mr. Philip Arundel, your husband?"

"Never!" said Margaret, instantly.

"No. What is the phrase—'whatever his conduct may have been, his language was always that of a gentleman'—that is the way smirking fools will talk about him."

Margaret made no answer.

"So the subject is not to be discussed," said Alban.

"Can you need to be told so?" said Mrs. Arundel, quietly.

"Then why do you want to see my father?" retorted her cousin, with downright asperity.

She looked at him with increasing wonder.

"Ha! the world again. Stifle the words that were upon our tongue. Don't say, 'Because he is an affectionate, gentle uncle, and you are a coarse brute of a cousin.' But say something. It is surely not polite to refuse an answer to a question. Say that you want to hear of dear St. Oscars, and dear Aunt Nelly, and dear cousin Bertha, and all that you used to love so. Say something, Mrs. Arundel, if it be ever so bland and insincere."

"The best thing for me to say, Alban, is that something has evidently occurred to make you different from what you usually are, and that it would be considerate in you not to revenge yourself by speaking unkindly to me, who have given you no offence."

"No offence—no offence! When you are deliberately inflicting the deadliest cruelty upon me."

"Alban! I!"

"You aggravate it with every word."

Again she was silent.

"You aggravate it with every look."

But she did not look away. She was too much amazed, bewildered.

"Yes. And you know it. What are you doing—what are you saying? That something may have troubled me, you do not know what, but that you have nothing to do with it. As if your trouble were not my trouble, Margaret," he said earnestly. "As if anything earthly could disturb me but your sorrows. As if my heart did not bleed with every wound in yours, and as if I would not gladly die to comfort or to avenge you. This you refuse to see."

"Alban, what, what on earth can you do for me?" said Mrs. Arundel, almost trembling at his changed manner.

"Do!" he exclaimed. "Ask a man who has loved madly, still loves madly, what he can do when the woman he loves is in need of his arm. Do! Shall I sweep all your enemies before you, drive them from off the face of God's world, trample them down, grind them to powder? You have but to speak. You have a father, a cruel and plotting miscreant; a husband, a debauched and cold-blooded oppressor. Will you be eased of them? You have but to say the word. I have a million means at my command. Shall they die by poison?" (he dropped his voice to a fierce whisper), "I have a thousand poisons. Shall they be strangled? I have the cord with which Judas hanged himself—I bought it at Jerusalem of a Carmelite. I will kill them so secretly that they shall be thought to have committed suicide. Speak!"

The terrible truth was before her—the naked, glaring, horrible truth. She gasped for breath as it came upon her like a hot and stifling wind, choking sensation.

"Ay, I have spoken out to you now, Margaret, my love, my darling. I have torn away the veil that was between our hearts, and you will be happy. I shall be happy. No more mysteries between us, Margaret, my beloved one. No more fiends in fine clothes to



"Alban."



shut red-hot doors between us, just as we were flying into each other's arms. We shall be happy now; but—" he suddenly dropped the impassioned tone in which he had been speaking, and whispered, "but first, we must make all safe, or we may be hunted and trapped again. Your father shall die to-night—your husband to-morrow. Keckling shall die too—not for his crimes, but because he links you with the wicked days that are past. You must have no remembrance of them, nothing to bring back memories, scratching in the shape of demons at your heart. They shall be strangled, all of them. That child——"

His speech was broken by the mother's cry, as his eye fell, in hate, upon the baby, amusing itself with a toy. She sprang to her feet, and her impulse was to dart upon Duke, and rush with him from the room; but a mother's thoughts are of lightning speed when they are for her child, and Margaret was checked. Her act would rouse the tigerish nature, and what would she be in the fierce grasp of the madman?

"That child must die!" he said, in a gentle, almost piteous voice; "and it is, a pity, because he has your eyes and lips, and would remind me of you—but what need of that, when you will never be out of my sight for a moment? We will bury him among flowers. I charge myself with that; but he must not live to connect you with the cursed Arundels. He shall die without knowing it. I have a violet wine, that is very sweet, and will send him calmly into the sleep that knows no waking."

Margaret thought that she could have borne his violence better than this—his voice had regained its old richness, and he spoke in a lover's tone, of a baby's death. It was not to be borne. Taking the little hand of the child in her own, she laid her other hand softly on her cousin's arm, and said with a forced calmness—

"Alban——"

She would have proceeded, but started in terror. That gentle touch produced a strange effect.

The expression of Alban's face suddenly changed, almost to distortion. He took a quick, shuddering breath, and then his muscles became rigid, and he stood as one who has sustained a pang of agony, and dares not move lest he discover that some dreadful thing has chanced to him.

So they stood for some moments, and Alban cried out with a bitter cry—

"The waters—the waters! They are closing over me."

"Dear Alban——"

"The waters—the waters!" he cried out again. "Do you not remember what I told you on that pier at Ryde. The drowning man is in the grasp of the savage waves. I told you that you should remember it one day when it should be too late. Let me drown—let me sink. Off with your hand! I, Alban Cheriton—I take the cast-off wife of such a thing as Philip Arundel! Off!"

And throwing her roughly from him, he rushed from the room with a frightful cry.

Though it had been to dash himself from a window, or down the

well staircase of the house, Margaret's thoughts followed him not. In one instant the mother had her child clutched to her heart, and the next they were flying through the opposite door to that at which the madman had hurried out. And in a safe and distant room, and behind bolt and lock, a rain of kisses had showered upon the wondering child—a rain of tears had fallen upon his bright curls, before Margaret had time for pitying thoughts of her cousin.

"Violet wine and a grave of flowers," were the words that she kept unconsciously murmuring to herself. "O, my heart's love, my own angel!"

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE CREATURE AT HOME.

It will be remembered that the Ayah, Boosey, eager to obtain news of her well-beloved lady, had traced Philip Arundel to his old chambers, and that she broke in upon him and his friend Claxton at a late hour one night, and demanded of the husband what he had done with the beautiful child of her idolatry. It was with great difficulty that the two gentlemen could satisfy her importunate hungering and thirsting for information on the subject dearest to her heart. Satisfy her, indeed, they could not, and after an interview in which the affectionate heathen had employed every variety of eloquence of which she was mistress to induce Philip to promise to seek out "Miss Maggie," and implore her pardon for his wickedness—which Boosey determinately took for granted nothing else could have alienated him from such an angel as Margaret—Claxton considered that he had really gained a victory in bringing her to withdraw, accepting his pledge that he would try to bring about her desire. He finally succeeded in placing the black door between himself and the Ayah, but was by no means convinced that she had left the Temple, and was not crouching in a corner of the staircase to be ready to accompany him on his mission.

And indeed Boosey, despite her long civilization at St. Oscars, would have had not the least hesitation in thus laying siege to Philip Arundel had it appeared to be expedient. But she had other views. With the instinct of her watchful race, she had in the early days of her St. Oscars sojourn made out the nature of Alban Cheriton, and detected his adoration of Margaret at a time when no other person suspected it. The Ayah admired the strong and influential character of Alban, and much preferred one who could on occasion show himself master of those around him to the gentler and more easy-natured young gentlemen who supposed themselves to be in love with Miss Maggie. In the earlier part of our book it was mentioned that one who intended to be a missionary had visited St. Oscars, and that his ardent and devoted bearing had excited in the bosom of Alban a certain terror lest his cousin should be fascinated by the power which woman recognises in real or even simulated energy. Boosey owed Alban a kindness in respect of this stranger's visit, for on his hearing that

one of the heathen whom he longed to convert was actually resident in St. Oscars, he insisted upon trying his force upon Boosey. Alban, not unnaturally antagonistic to his suspected rival, and not sorry to have an opportunity of showing that he too could be energetic and determined, had withstood this wish so warmly, and had so indignantly protested against Boosey's being tormented, that his Christian character had been in no small danger of suspicion on the part of his dissenting friends. His father and mother were strangely puzzled at his vehement display of anti-proselytism, but he gained his purpose, or supposed purpose, and saved the Ayah from a terrible assault on her creed. This good deed she never forgot, and it established a sort of friendship between the ignorant heathen and the brilliant Christian. They continued to exchange kind messages through the other Cheritons during Alban's stay in London. Boosey, in her unutterable grief at discovering that "something was wrong about Miss Maggie," no sooner resolved to rush to town and rescue her from whatever tiger might now be menacing her (as in other days), than she determined on enlisting her great and honoured friend Mr. Alban in the cause of Margaret. That her visit to Philip was paid before she had time to seek out Alban, was the result of her accidentally discovering that the Temple, near which her only London female acquaintance and hostess lived, was not a place of religion, but, on the contrary, a haunt of lawyers. Philip she knew was a lawyer, and her friend's research did the rest. But as soon as she had expended her remonstrances upon Philip—he received them, be it said, with a sort of melancholy gentleness, and without the least resentment (perhaps if a white inferior had taken such a liberty her reception might have been different)—the untiring Boosey resolved to find Alban.

Alban's residence was next day reached by Boosey, but upon reconnoitring it cautiously, after the manner of her race, before applying to see the young surgeon, the Ayah perceived her St. Oscars patron and friend, his father, at a window. An interview with Mr. Cheriton formed no part of her present plan, and she therefore waited, with Oriental patience, hour after hour, until she saw Cheriton leave the house. Then, making her demand, she found that her long vigil had been thrown away, Mr. Alban Cheriton was absent, and his return uncertain.

An English person of one sex (or, possibly, of another) would have been revenged on the troublesome destinies by some more or less decorous oburgations; but the pagan calmly accepted the decree of fortune, and walked away to consider her next best step to gain her object. Boosey wandered through a large district lying in the neighbourhood of the New Road, and may have thought that the semi-gentility of the locality much resembled that of the respectable part of her own country town, and may have wondered at the marvellous consumption of beer by the residents, as proved by the fact that no street ever seemed without a yelping emissary from some hostel, either proclaiming the fluid or demanding its metallic receptacles. Had she been a Mahometan she might have imagined she was hearing the cries of some peripatetic *muezzin*.

"Smoking, too," said Alban, as he entered the small drawing-room

of a comfortable little two-storied house in one of the small streets through which Boosey's pilgrimage lay.

The house was that of the Creature, our wayward acquaintance Maria, here for her own reasons calling herself, as hath been revealed, Mrs. Prescott. The drawing-room was excellently, one might almost say richly, furnished; for many of Maria's chattels were of an expensive character, and savoured too much of *luxe* for the neighbourhood in which they were then placed. There were none of the usual lodging-house features about her room. Not there was the rigid, paltry-looking carpet, that seemed fine-drawn at points, and ready to split up at a hasty movement of a chair. Not there the rickety round table, oil-skin covered, and oscillating at a touch, after the manner of a nautically hung telescope frame. Not there the three or four pale ill-finished mahogany dining-room chairs, with horsehair seats, and with their intrusion into the drawing-room apologized for, as it were, by as many four-and-sixpenny dubious companions in rosewood. Not there were the thin moreen curtains, of scrimp measure, and evidently never made to draw; nor the miserable little painted closet called a Shiffonear, smelling of fustiness generally, with a slight predominance of pepper, and adorned with the remnants of a bronze lamp, long eclipsed for ever. Nor, on the walls, were the usual decorations of the district, the two pictures—one of the ruins, one of the sea—and each bearing a moon the size of a peppermint lozenge, and casting a long white splash down an unimaginable back-ground; the art treasury being also enriched by the portraits in oil of a scowling man and a smirking woman (with watch, chain, bunch of seals, and jam-tart brooch), supposed to be the owner of the house and his female, and by two black profile portraits of two ugly boys, the unfortunate consequence of the union. Nor, lastly, was the mantelpiece made to hold a villanous narrow looking-glass, in which the eye of the feeblest imagination could read the "only eighteen shillings" that had been beaten down to fifteen, when Mrs. Bloggs was furnishing to let, and used to sally out at night, with a similar hard-faced matron, and grind the face of brokers until what were deemed bargains were extorted.

Maria had brought in furniture of her own, had thrown down a deep, soft, warm carpet over the very possible abomination below, had swept away the equally possible pictorial trash, and hung, in much too fine frames, some coloured French engravings, large, clever, and chiefly scriptural; for the naked Oriental narratives afford our friends the French artists great opportunities for being objectionable. A large handsome mirror reflected the room, and into that mirror was reflected a gilded girandole, while below was an exceedingly handsome cabinet; and if the china behind the glass doors were rubbish, so is that in a thousand smart houses. Whose business is it whether a lady's cup cost shillings or guineas? Moreover, Maria had some pretty tables with pretty things on them; some good, for they had been presents, but a woman can do a world in this way with a slender purse and a knowledge of the arcades; and what with some showy curtains, and delicate mats, and some statuettes, and a wonderful great white cat, and a bright fire, and a presence of pastille odour,



(besides another), and Maria herself, in a large morning dress, lounging, slippered, in a luxurious easy chair, the place was quite as pleasant as it needed to be. Nobody but a snob would have supposed that he was in a lady's room; but many a good and gentle lady is much more snobbishly lodged, and her husband ought to be ashamed of himself.

"Smoking, too," said Alban, as the privileged doctor entered the room unannounced. "Good for the lungs, of course."

"Only *cigarettes*, you old growl, and uncommon mild, like me. Have some?"

"Not I."

"Affectation! All the great ladies smoke, I hear, only they go into the lady's-maids' rooms to do it. I don't keep a lady's maid, except Zuleika; so I does as I pleases, and what's the odds as long as you're happy?"

"Oh, if you're happy, keep so, by all means," said Alban. "I shall give you no more advice."

"Made his fortune, going to retire, live on his estate—kill pigs? Send us a brisket now and then, for luck."

"Where's Zuleika?"

"Is *she* a pig? Any how she sleeps like one. There's no getting her up of a morning, or afternoon either. I suppose she has been on short allowance of sleep all her life, and now she's taking it out."

"How does she behave?" said Alban.

"How should I know?"

"A nice guardian you are, Mrs. Prescott, to a young and fragile charge."

"I told you at starting that I was not going to be bothered. I give orders that she shall get up when she likes, and have exactly what she chooses to eat and drink. I'm out before she's up, and she's abed——"

"In bed!"

"Abed I choose to say—and she's there before I come home from the opera, or wherever it is. What more can an anxious mother do? Am I to give her tracts? Because I don't see what particular good they will do her small mind, seeing as how she wouldn't read 'em if she could, and couldn't read 'em if she would."

\*"Teach her."

"Teach your grandmother to suck eggs. Do you take me for a governess, governor?" said Maria, sending some smoke out at her nostrils, a feat that was immediately followed by a paroxysm of distressing cough.

Alban allowed the fit to exhaust itself without his making the slightest movement or endeavour to allay its violence; and when it was over, and Maria looked at him with eyes streaming with tears drawn forth by the agitation, he met her piteous regard with a slow, deliberate smile.

It was characteristic that she seized a handkerchief, wiped her eyes hastily, and with deliberation, in her turn, selected a fresh *cigarette* from a gaily embroidered case. As she took a light she said—

"Experience makes fools wise, so as I am no wiser by experience

I am not a fool. There's argument for you, Mr. Death's Head and Cross Bones."

"Ominous words!" said Alban, cruelly. "People should be careful how they use them, under some circumstances."

"Bother!" returned Maria, promptly, but a shade paler than she had been. "Am I going to have a fit of coffin sooner for saying undertaker. I'm not superstitious. Key Sarah Sarah, as the Italians say, and when Sarah brings the key, into the locker we go, and not before. Now then."

Alban gave a long-drawn, half-pitying, half-contemptuous sigh, that was particularly offensive to the excitable Maria.

"What are you making that sort of noise for? Speak, if you've got anything to say, and if you haven't, hold your tongue, but don't make noises at people as if they were dogs and cats. What's brought you here this morning in this humour? If you can't be civil, suppose you were to stop away till you can, and don't hurry yourself on my account."

And the *cigarette* went into the fire, and Maria snatched up the first book in her hand, and began reading intensely.

"How women differ!" said Alban, quietly.

"Then you'd better go to the sort you like best," snapped Maria.

"I have come from that sort," pursued Alban; "and I thought that I should like to tell you why."

"I don't want to hear anything about it. I hate to be insulted, mind that."

"Why should I insult you?" returned Alban.

"Because I cannot help myself, of course. That's the way of the world. Trample on those that are down."

As she stood up upon her hearth, with an indignant look, a passing flush on her cheek, and a compressed mouth, she was as little like one who is down as could well be imagined. But the inspiration was but momentary, the cheek paled and flushed, and paled again, and it was with a tremor in all her limbs that Maria re-seated herself, and then the tears came to her eyes.

"And me so ill," she said, with piteous reproach.

"It takes two to make a quarrel, Maria," said Alban, quite unmoved, though to take the hand of a handsome woman who had made appeal in such a tone, and to try to soothe her, would have been instinctive with most men. "I shall not be one of the two. I have a duty to perform, and that is why I came here."

"An odd place to choose to perform duties in," laughed out Maria, hysterically, amid her tears. "Are you sure you haven't come to the wrong shop?"

"Maria, will you listen to me?"

He spoke in a graver voice than he had been accustomed to use in conversation with the Creature. His usual banter, in which alternated a certain pity with a certain cynicism, was gone, and he really seemed to have an important communication to make.

She looked at him for a minute, and I do not like to say what idea rushed upon the poor girl's mind. He had come from good women, and he had something to say to her. Those who quite understand

a character which I have sought to make as little prominent as is consistent with the purposes of our story, will comprehend the hasty and troubled glance which she cast upon her property (it had not been long in that resting-place), and the reason why she supposed that she might have no special motive for longer bearing the name she had last assumed; for there be ravens, as well as doves, that find no rest for the sole of their feet, poor ravens! But the idea was dissipated almost as soon as formed.

"Don't frighten me, please," she said. "You don't know how really ill I am, though I laugh it off."

"Do I not, poor child?" said Alban. But there was no kindness in the tone.

"Well, don't frighten me," she repeated, earnestly.

"Maria, I have revenged you."

She gazed at him for some moments, and then in a helpless, dreamy way repeated, as asking a question—

"Revenged? Me?"

"Yes, revenged you fully, amply. Even what women, whose passion is vengeance, would call a full and ample revenge."

"And on whom, in goodness' name?"

"Maria!" he paused for a little while, and then went on. "You were a better plotter than I was, Maria, and laid your foundations deep, very deep, but I have put the chief corner-stone to the building."

She had never heard of chief corner-stones, but Alban's mind was loose and rambling among some of the recollections of a religious household.

"You came to me long, long ago, and you brought me letters, which I should not have read, but that you made me read them by a clever artifice. Yes, you left them with me, and I put them away; but you knew that they would rest in no hiding-place, but would one day come out and be learned by heart. Those were his letters to you."

"But, but," gasped Maria, turning deadlier pale than ever, as not only this act of hers, but the scene which she had witnessed from Alban's bed chamber came full upon her mind; "but you have not betrayed—you have not——" and a conflict of feelings threw the girl into a renewed tremor.

"I have done your work and my own, and done neither negligently," said Alban. "Do you want your lover back again—your Philip Arundel? Because I believe that you may have him again for the calling."

Maria was silent. She remembered all she had heard, with the door ajar, when Philip and Alban had that terrible interview at which Alban had sought to crush all the husband's faith in his wife. Of what had passed since she was ignorant. Of Mrs. Arundel's persecution by her father, of her rescue by Mr. Keckling, of Philip's persistence in estrangement from Margaret, of course Maria knew nothing. In truth, when the first storm of her grief at severance from Philip had given way to bitterness and wildness, there was nothing that he could do that she did not narrowly watch, with the vigilance

of one who was clinging to her only hope. We have seen that she even followed him to the sea, and crouched in concealment to learn what she could of her who had been a successful rival. But later, when all hope was over, when she found that Philip was happy with his young and beautiful bride, and that society, closing round the prosperous couple, effectually shut her out from all chance of restoring her relations with Philip Arundel, angry emotion was succeeded by a half-despairing, half-reckless tone of mind, which made her adverse to any meditation upon the past, and induced her rather to avoid hearing anything that could strongly remind her of the old days. The scene at Alban's had been in a manner forced upon her attention, and it is not in woman, when painful secrets are being exchanged, not to try to have a part in the mystery. But after that excitement was over, Maria had sought, as far as she could, to forget the occasion. Her failing health, too, made her, unconsciously to herself, eager to enjoy, in her whimsical capricious way, what time might be left to her, and she gradually feared that her life, though still large enough for pleasure, had no longer room left in it for passion. Others, beside such as was Maria, suddenly find themselves similarly dwarfed. Hence, when Alban broke upon her with an idea, long and utterly abandoned, Maria, who at their first interview would have covered his feet with tears of gratitude for such a suggestion, now felt not hostile towards Philip, but strangely ill-disposed towards him who had stirred the buried memories.

"You don't thank me," said Alban, after some moments of silence on each side. "But there are thanks which lie too deep for words."

"I have nothing to thank you for," said Maria, hurriedly. "No, I mean you have been very kind to me, in your way, and I am very much obliged for all that." For she instinctively clung by any friend, as those always do who may not long be likely to need any friendship.

"You mean that what I have done was to serve my own purpose, rather than yours. Well, right. But what matters the motive? I have done it, and you are the gainer."

"But what have you done?" asked Maria, bewildered.

"I have used the poison you gave me to use."

"Poison! I!" And her memory ran a curious round, touching upon the various medicines she had received from Alban; and her wandering imagination began to frame some crude notion of a plot, such as she had seen in plays or read in novels, of changed bottles, and murder innocently wrought.

"Yes, poison," he repeated; "good, deadly, concentrated poison, and all the deadlier for being disguised in honey."

Then, the only definite idea arising in poor Maria's mind was that she hated honey, and she looked vacantly at Cheriton, and made no answer.

"I am talking shop to you, as they say," he went on, "and that is not right; and in good society, like Mrs. Arundel's, it is esteemed vulgar," with a savage bitterness on the name. "I mean that you supplied me with the means of separating your Philip and his Margaret—she don't call herself *his* Margaret now, you must know—and I have used the means to perfection. They will never speak to one another again until they meet at the judgment."

"What is that to me?" said Maria, sadly.

"Why, everything, if what you told to me with your sobs and your tears, in my consulting room, the first night we ever met, meant anything but folly. You said you loved the man, swore it, begged me to move heaven and earth to bring him back to you; and, Maria, you showed me how to do it. Were you playing the fool with me? If so, beware of me, for I am dangerous."

"O, do not threaten me, do not terrify me. I *am* so ill. What have I done?"

"Done? Done well, and like a loving woman, who can love and can dare for love. I, too, have done something in that way; but the plot was yours, and yours is the glory of the victory. That was a lovely letter, a beautiful letter! When he was writing it to you from that lord's house in Scotland, the devil himself must have been whispering the words to him, and must have heated the wax that bore that fine brave aristocratic seal, with the castle on it, which no doubt he thought it a proud thing to use. He little thought how it would break down *his* castle." And Alban's laugh was anything but a pleasant one.

"I remember the letter," said Maria; "he put some heather flowers into it. I have the heather now. I have kept it, like a fool."

"Not in the least like a fool, but with a sage presentiment that you would one day put it to his lips, and ask him whether he remembered it. You recollect the letter. So does Margaret Arundel, and will do so to her dying day. I chose it out of the heap you gave me—by the way, I must give you them back, for they are too precious to be in cold keeping like mine. I chose it, I tell you, out of the heap; and the way that I managed it should reach his wife's hands when he was too far off to be reproached, and embraced, and forgiven (I took care of that)—ha, Maria, my *finesse* was worthy of a woman."

Maria looked as if she wished to hear more.

"I went up and talked to her about her child's health—she had a child, you know, and her very heart is in that child—to say she would die for it is to say nothing; but *you* can't understand what that sort of woman is with a baby—she looks into its eyes as if she saw into heaven, and when it smiles——"

But here Maria, who had been standing near her chair, dropped into it on her knees, and burst into passionate weeping. She did not know what it was to love a baby! And the miserable November afternoon, and the little coffin under the damp pall, and the cruel creditor in the evening, all came back to the Creature.

As before, he allowed her to recover from the excitement without a word of comfort.

But as soon as she had somewhat calmed, he went on.

"I managed to send her from the room, and while she was gone, I placed that lovely letter in her writing-desk. I knew that she would soon have to search that hiding-place. When she did, she found the letter, for she sent it back to the writer; but she had first left his house."

This latter act was already known to Maria. She did not reply.

"All that I have to regret is, that I could not see her read the precious epistle. How delightful it must have been to her, for she loved him as much as ever woman loved a man ; loves him still too, which makes your revenge the sweeter. To read all those passionate words, all those playful phrases, all those little allusions to home happiness and home secrets, all that nonsense which a man writes only to a woman's heart, not her head—only when he loves her enough to believe that her heart will judge his words—and then to reflect that it was all addressed, only the other day, to some other woman, not to divine Margaret herself, mother of his all-perfect child. You could perhaps have contrived to have this sweetest morsel of revenge ; you could have listened at some door, or hid yourself—as you did at Ryde—in some lurking-place, but my invention failed me. However, it was done, and the woman went nearly mad, and left her husband. So, he is yours for the asking."

And while he spoke, and while he alluded to the secreting a letter, and listening, something which had well nigh passed away from Maria's memory came back to her. That something had been the work of a few seconds only, and might easily escape such a mind as hers.

"So he has got back my letter," said Maria, in a low voice.

"He brought it to me, and gave it me the day you had to hide in my bedroom. It has done its duty twice, perhaps it may do it a third time, in reviving all the feelings under which it was written. That is something like a letter—talk of the inspired epistles—there's a vitality for you."

This Maria was not heeding, nor would she have comprehended it had she heeded.

"Well," he said, "you should lose no time, for men like Philip Arundel are easily caught at and easily lost. The coast is clear now, and you had better act promptly. You should send for him directly, and make matters up."

"He come to *me*, after I have acted so treacherous, giving up his letters."

"Pooh, don't make difficulties in your own way. If he cares about you, a little soft talk will make him look at that act in its true light, as a proof of the intensity of your affection for him. Men are wonderfully charitable to crimes they believe have been committed for their sakes."

"He would not come," murmured Maria.

"You make me savage with your helplessness," said Alban, emphatically ; "a girl wants to see a man who has loved her, and can devise no way to bring him to her. It would not quite do for me to send him, because I am, you know, horribly shocked at his treatment of my dear and ill-used cousin, yet I would almost—but, bah ! Write and say that you are dying, and for the memory of old times would like to touch a hand that had once been kind, or any other lie that is waiting in that inkstand ready to leap into a woman's pen."

"And he has separated from his—from Mrs. Arundel, and they can never be united again?"

"Never."

"And where is she?"

"She lives with old Keckling—Cackling, as you insisted on calling him."

"And the baby?"

"Where she is, that you may swear, if it were the ends of the earth, or in any of the four corners of the same, as the Scriptures scientifically describe it."

"But there is some other quarrel, is there not?" ventured Maria; "is there not some disreputable relative——"

She glanced cautiously at him as she spoke. He was silent for half a minute or so, and then he broke into a laugh, and pointed with outstretched arm and finger at her.

"Ha! you were listening in my bedroom. I might have guessed it, but your pretended sleep was so good. That's how you know that Philip is enraged with you. And knowing you, and your class, and what you are, and how well you plot, it was monstrous idiocy in me to suppose that you would not be listening. Do you know, I sometimes think my brain is not what it was. I am bewitched, like the foolish Galatians. But it was very crafty of you to listen, very clever. And then to make me tell you everything as if you did not know it. By heaven, I have such a good mind to strangle you!"

And he looked so fierce that Maria, in ghastly terror, shrunk into her chair like a child that would resist being taken out for punishment.

A child, however, for whom no punishment had any special terror, here broke rather than came into the room through the folding door, and changed the current of Alban's ideas. It was Zuleika, who had been pleased to arise from her couch at last, and came bouncing in. Perceiving Alban, the young lady had the grace to apologize for her somewhat incomplete toilette, an apology for which there was some reason, inasmuch as a pair of slippers on her naked feet, and a splendid shawl of Maria's wrapped fantastically round the girl, were the only additions she had made to her sleeping attire. Her hair was all loose and tangled, but a gay red *chenille* net affected to restrain some of it within bounds.

"You ugly monkey," said Alban, in uncivil earnest.

"Same to you, brother," returned the girl, whose powers of repartee had not been diminished by her residence in the domain of demi-civilization.

"Give me your hand," he said, drawing Zuleika rather roughly towards him.

"I want it for myself," replied Zuleika, "it's the only one, except this other, that I've got."

"Don't be a fool," said Alban, peremptorily; and as he held her in his powerful grasp, Zuleika thought that it might be as well not to risk, by any further resistance, the chance of his administering physical castigation.

He felt her pulse, looked steadily in her face until her bold grey eyes turned upon his, and then he dropped them. He placed his ear to her chest, and released her.

"Warranted sound, wind and limb?" demanded Zuleika, as soon as she was out of immediate reach.

"Warranted a Limb," replied Alban. "Maria, let her have

exactly what she fancies. It is of no manner of consequence what she eats or drinks."

"You are the pride of the doctors," said Zuleika; "and when I marry the Duke of Dumbledowndearyshire, you shall be my head cook and bottle-washer."

Noticing neither the compliment nor the promise, Alban said, "Look to her, Maria. It wout last long."

Maria, with a convulsive sob, looked pityingly at the child, and held out her arms. And, imp as she was, Zuleika's evil little heart was touched by the genuine lovingness of the look and motion, and she sprang to Maria's knees, and buried the elf-locks in her lap.

"Sentiment here too, as well as in decent society," said Alban, with a curious sneer. And he went abruptly out of the room, and out of the house.

His hand was on the door-knob, when an unexpected vision encountered him.

It was the Ayah, whose wanderings had led her into the street in which Mrs. Prescott lived, and who, examining, as was her habit, every window as she went along, had caught a glimpse of Alban in the course of his interview with Maria, and of course waited—and would have waited till midnight—to pounce upon him.

"What, Boosey!" exclaimed Alban. "The blackness of darkness come upon us! And what brings you to Babylon, you dear old heathen?"

"O, Mr. Alban! Poor Miss Maggie!"

"Poor Miss Maggie!" repeated Alban, whose mood had suddenly taken a hilarious character. "Poor Miss Maggie! Is that the way to speak of the beautiful and accomplished Mistress Philip Arundel? Have you no respect for persons, you ancient Canidia? Poor Miss Maggie, indeed!"

"But Mr. Alban, will he come back to her?" asked the affectionate and single-minded Ayah.

"He? Who, Canidia? He means a good many people in this big city."

"O, you know, Mr. Alban. I seen him, Mr. Philp, but he 'ull not say."

"You've seen Mr. Philp, as you call him?"

"Been in his rooms, top of the stone stairs. But he 'ull not say. What is us to do?"

"And so you have been to the Temple, trying to make peace between the Christian husband and wife, have you?" And he laughed long and loud. "Well done, you good old heathen, and for your good intentions may a thousand years be taken off your time in Padalon. But you have a zeal which is not according to knowledge, Boosey, do you know that?"

"Dont'ee laugh, Mr. Alban."

"Not laugh, Boosey. Why, is that against the Shaster?"

"Poor Miss Maggie!"

"Why, what a black cuckoo you are, Boosey."

"Will he come back to her?"

"Hm, Boosey," said Alban, affecting to survey her deliberately, and to consider her words. "Will he come back, you say, meaning



will Mr. Philip Arundel return to the arms of your former mistress, Mrs. Philip Arundel? Well, dear Boosey, I should say that he would certainly not come back."

"O, Mr. Alban!"

"Neither, Boosey, is it altogether fitting and right that he should return to Miss Maggie."

"He is a bad man, but she will pardon. She is all good."

"That piece of profanity we will pass over, Boosey, in consideration of your limited lights. But you ought to know by this time, Ayah, that though in your own country gentlemen are allowed to have as many wives as they can keep, in this country we allow a man only one."

"I know, Mr. Alban."

"If you know that, Boosey, why do you ask Mr. Philip to break the laws?"

"He breaks Miss Maggie's heart."

"That is very sad, very sad—but laws must be kept, though hearts are broken. Mr. Philip's wife lives in this very house, and your foot is upon her door-stone."

"Miss Maggie," exclaimed the delighted Ayah. "I will go to her."

"You shall go in, if you please, and welcome. I undertake that for you. Come along."

And pushing back the door, which he had not closed, he entered, closely followed by the eager Boosey.

They went upstairs, and Alban, throwing open the drawing-room door, pointed out the occupants to the Ayah. Maria was in her chair, sorrowfully embracing Zuleika, who knelt before her, with her dishevelled hair on the shoulder of Maria.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Arundel," said Alban. "There, Boosey, is Mr. Philip Arundel's real wife, and there is his child. It is no wonder that, with such creatures to love, he has nothing more to say to your unhappy mistress."

The two girls stared in utter bewilderment.

Boosey gazed for some time, until she thoroughly comprehended what was told her, and her whole frame shook with rage. Three or four times she raised her long lean arms, and sought to speak, but no words came. In fact, her English did not serve her for a hundredth part of what she desired to say. But at length it became necessary for her to give utterance to her wrath, and though aware that not a syllable of what she said was understood, she poured forth a frantic torrent of curses in her own language, accompanied by the most lavish gestures of menace and warning.

At a pause, Alban laid his hand on the Ayah's arm to remove her. She shook off his touch, and, as resolved that something at least of her anger should be understood by her audience, she exclaimed, pointing to Maria—

"I should like to burn her head!"

And then Alban drew her from the room.

"Does it not burn enough?" said poor Maria, again clasping the child in an affectionate embrace.

## CHAPTER XLII.

## DARKER YET.

It need hardly be said, that when Henry Cheriton had in some measure recovered from his first overwhelming grief, and could summon calmness to address himself to duty, the duty that lay readiest to his hand was of a nature to afflict him even more bitterly than aught that preceded it had done. It was his terrible task to communicate to his wife, to Alban's mother, the fatal news that the intellect, so admired by that father, so adored by that mother, had given way in the storm of life, and been wrecked on its hidden rocks. He felt that it must be told by letter. They had never yet had a sorrow that, when it came, they had not borne breast to breast, and side by side, cast before the Healer. But, strong and good man as was Cheriton, he quailed under the thought of seeing the mother's first agony. She must compose that loving face from the torture of such tidings under she turned to his arms. In tears—not in wild shudder and with a wild cry—she must come, the bereaved one, to his bosom. He did not even chide himself for this weakness; he did not seek to overcome it by an exertion of his strong will. Henry Cheriton owned that to be the bearer of such news was more than he could endure, and he refused a task beyond his strength.

He wrote. And when, in after years, it chanced that in sadly reading through the treasured papers of one who had gone before him, with a smile on her dying lip, to her reward, he came upon this letter, he did not much marvel that he had broken the tidings so tenderly and well. For the unutterable love, which, in those after years of solitude and desolation, filled his heart, told him that his heart's deepest recesses must have been searched to supply him with what he should say in the day of the great affliction. But it were scarcely well to seek to place that letter here.

Then Henry Cheriton applied himself to the duty that had brought him from St. Oscars to London. He had learned from the letter to Alban, opened by himself, that Margaret was at Mr. Keckling's house. And he went there to her.

The agitation of such a meeting being over, Margaret sat with him, her hand in his, in the room where the fearful interview with her cousin had taken place. She told him, in gentle and almost whispered words, what had occurred between Alban and herself. The confirmation was complete; but no confirmation had been needed by the keen intellect of Cheriton, who had learned all in the ante-chamber of that accursed lecture-room.

"We will speak of yourself, dearest child," said her uncle, after some minutes of silence.

"O! not in your own heavy, heavy trouble."

"It was to do so, dearest Maggie," he said, "that I came, with your aunt's earnest concurrence, to town."

"Dear Aunt Nelly."

"Nay, you never doubted *her* love, Maggie?" he said, tenderly. "You were always her child; and does a mother's love ever grow cold? Do you think that you have ever been forgotten—you know when and where?"

Margaret's arms round his neck made answer for her.

"And now, dear one, you must tell me all—all your story; and we must see whether your old uncle cannot do something to get back the happiness of his darling. Or, rather let me save you all the pain I can, by telling you what we know, or suppose ourselves to know. The gentleman who became your husband has, in some degree, I fear, justified what I ventured to say to you, Maggie, in that long walk of ours in the Regent's Park, when a dear and loving girl, though willing to listen to advice, was overborne by her own belief in her lover. Do not think, for a moment, that I am hinting a reproach, my own child—all was most natural; and perhaps I might not have been more hopeful for your happiness if I had succeeded in turning you away from one to whom your affections had been given. But that is of the past. Mr. Arundel has not known how to appreciate the wife whom God had given him, and estrangement has followed. Now, dear Margaret, you must tell me something of that estrangement. Is it a breach that—I speak to a Christian lady—can be healed by the intervention of friends?"

What a question was that for poor Margaret to answer. She was slow to speak, and no wonder. It was not because she did not perfectly understand the meaning of the inquiry, but because she did. Henry Cheriton perceived that he was unduly pressing her.

"You hesitate, my love, and that is the best sign I could receive; for I am sure that my Margaret Arundel could not hesitate if the truth were a sad and a disgraceful one, and she had a husband who had been base to her—unworthy to be named by her."

"No, no; Philip is not that," exclaimed Margaret, sobbing.

"Then, with God's blessing, my dear child, we will hope that all may be well. And there can be nothing which it can be more than painful for you to tell me, and you will not mind the pain. It is a sad and a grievous thing when wife and husband even suspend that sacred relationship, and I will not say that any needless delay in returning to mutual duty may not amount to guilt. The word is a harsh word, dear love, but the oath of marriage is a solemn thing."

"Oh, it is, it is!" said Margaret.

"Therefore, love, let us avoid all possible playing with sin. I have come to do my best for you; and if I may have the comfort in my own great affliction to know that I have helped to put an end to yours, it will be something to take back to my poor home."

"If it could be so! If I could be—"

"Come, half the difficulty is over, if it is the earnest wish of one of you that this unchristian state of things should be ended. Now, tell me, dearest. The separation—how was it? He left you, and how?"

"I left him," said Margaret, in a low and firm voice.

"And yet," said her uncle, gravely, "there was no such wrong as may not be forgiven—I mean, in the world's language? Poor Alban

wrote to us that you had left Mr. Arundel, Margaret ; but your aunt believed him to be in error, and I had since made up my mind that his letter was but another symptom of his malady."

"I left him, uncle," repeated Margaret, with calmness.

"I must wait to hear more, my child."

"You shall hear all, dearest uncle—all," she said, passionately.

"And you and my aunt, and bless her—O, tell her how I bless her for her trust in me—tell her that, dear uncle—"

"Indeed I will."

"You shall be judges, and there is no other judgment in this world that I would ask, whether I have been wrong."

And she told him her story from the beginning ;—told it frankly and candidly, yet with wifely jealousy of saying more to the prejudice of her husband than she should have said, glancing very lightly indeed over the actual wrong things that Philip had done, utterly omitting any mention of his vicious irregularities (in one great case, her heart went back to the kiss at his chambers and the happy day by the Clifden woods), and even withholding all allusion to the scene at the opera. But she laid, she could not help laying, stress upon his neglect and coldness, which had stung her more than any folly or wrong that could be confessed and forgiven ; and then she approached the miserable business of the discovered letter, and the tale that it told. Here our Margaret's womanly heart was too strong for her, and to her childhood's friend, her loved and honoured uncle, she poured out her grief with a fulness, and perhaps with an indignation, in which she had never indulged when to friends less dear to her she had (it was seldom) spoken of her troubles.

He heard her to the end without interrupting her, but with an occasional kindly pressure of the hand, or an encouraging murmur, helping her on her way. And then she was silent, and he said, after a pause :

"Dear child, you have been sorely tried, and the wound has come, as always, where we least expect to be injured. You have been stricken through the affections that should have been guarded with all the devotion a husband could show. I know, dear love, how you have suffered, and you do not want to be told how I feel for and with you."

There was, however, something in his tone that made Margaret look up wistfully in his face.

"I have been wrong?" she exclaimed, with agitation. And then the pride of her nature came to her aid, and she said to herself that let even her uncle decide against her, she had not been wrong, and she stilled herself to hear what he would say.

"It is very sad that your husband should have shown himself so shallow, so unworthy, I would say so profligate. It was a deep grief to you, dear child, and I am not one who would lay a burden on another beyond the power to support it. God knows I have myself this very day shrunk from a trial which I feared. But if you have told me all, and I know that you have, Maggie, bear with me while I say that those who counselled you to break up your home, and leave it, gave you counsel which—which you should never have had from me."

"I was my own counsellor, dearest uncle. No one knew of my intention."

"You reached Hastings before informing any friend or relation?"

"Yes; or, I ought to say, I intended to do so, uncle."

"And you were accompanied, perhaps?"

"Indeed I was. And this brings me to another part of my troubles, Uncle Henry."

Cheriton made no reply. Alban's letter once more flashed to his mind. One portion of it which he had supposed to be false had turned out true, and what if the insinuation that Margaret had not been unaccompanied in her flight by one whose presence meant—

Henry Cheriton trembled. His fatherly love for the fair young creature before him caused a shudder through his frame. And yet it was but for a second. The picture his wife had drawn of the innocent child, kneeling, barefooted, at her little prayer, rushed across his eyes and filled them with a mist, and this he had hardly brushed away when the open and ingenuous face of the beautiful wife and mother succeeded to the picture. He could not look twice in that face and fear for her. Yet he said—

"You went down alone to Hastings—I mean, except with your child and servant?"

"O, if I had, dear uncle, what added trouble might have been spared me."

"Who was your companion, Margaret?" asked her uncle, in the most composed voice he could use.

"My father."

Her reply was so frank and natural, and the tone was so nearly pitiful, that Henry Cheriton, between relief and sympathy, felt his eyes swimming in tears. But he was, for a moment, actually happy, even with her sorrow and his own to bear. It is not easy to say how much he loved that girl.

And then came the new revelation, the whole story of Armandale Spencer, and his suddenly discovering himself to Margaret, and assuming the place of protector, and the shameful confession that he had made of his character. And there was the scene between Mr. Keckling and Mr. Spencer, or rather so much of it as poor Margaret had heard, or the former had deemed it necessary to relate to her, and the suppression of her letter, and all the rest of the Hastings story. All this, however distressing, Margaret told with perfect fluency and calmness—there was nothing to Philip's discredit in the history, and there was no need, therefore, for her to pick her way, or soften truths. And for the astonished Cheriton, who had heard nothing of the return and intrigues of the Indian adventurer, a new light dawned upon the conduct of Margaret. How rejoiced he was to be able to see possible excuses for the step which he had been conscientiously inclined to condemn.

"Margaret, love," he said, "it seems as if your way in life was indeed hedged with thorns, but we know—you know—that the thorn hedges are appointed in mercy to keep us from straying. But that we may hasten to the end of our story, and consider our course of action, let me ask you something more. I do not require to be told that

you have not said a word more against the conduct of Mr. Arundel than he deserved, but I imagine that you have, on the contrary, said less, and on an important point. The Arundels had, as I gather, become aware of this unhappy return of your father?"

"Certainly. He made his way into the house of Philip's father, and threatened——"

"Yes, yes. And they, feeling the shame and disgrace of such a connexion, visited it upon you, and your husband used your father's character as a pretext for ill-treating you, poor child?"

"He was never so unkind," replied Margaret, with heightened colour, and if the truth must be spoken, with somewhat of increased brightness in her eye. "Whatever else I may have to mourn over, I have no reproach of that kind to make. Not only was Philip most scrupulous never to make an allusion to the unhappy circumstances, but here, in this very room, dear uncle, and in his presence, he and his father warmly declared that my misfortune was theirs, and that their only concern was to defend us all against anything my father was likely to do."

[Now this had been old Mr. Arundel's speech, not Philip's; but the wife may be pardoned for making her husband party to a declaration of which at all events he was a witness.]

"That conduct of the Arundel family was very noble, Margaret. I do not say that they did more than Christians were bound to do, but how few act up to that standard."

"It was most noble, uncle; and the kind way in which the sad business was received made me still more grateful."

And it was impossible to doubt the sincerity with which she spoke, and Cheriton could not but admire it, though she had now cut away the ground on which he had hoped to be able to build justification for her leaving the home of her husband.

"Then, dear child, as I now understand, you have had no communication with Mr. Philip Arundel since you left St. John's Wood."

"None. Stay," said Margaret, whose truthful nature would not allow her to rest on the verbal accuracy of her answer to a question, "I ought to say that I have heard nothing from him."

"But you have written to him."

"No," said Margaret, colouring highly, "not written to him. But I could not help—indeed, it seemed due—at least—I enclosed to him *that* letter."

"The letter found in your writing-desk. Ah, Margaret, we are never so prone to do a wilful thing as when we have just done a wrong one."

"Dear uncle, if you knew how you grieve me by what you say! And how much more I am grieved that I cannot bring myself to think as you do."

"I will not lose time in argument, Margaret. We have our work to do, and we will set about it at once, for if there were no other reason for our speed, I must hasten down to St. Oscars to comfort one whose heart will be half-broken when I arrive."

"My darling aunt. O, what a trial! How *will* she bear it?"

"You know, dear. But it is indeed a trial. There, we will not allow it to intrude, while other matters call on us. It appears to me, my love, that my course is at once to seek your husband. Happily, he has, I believe, a good opinion of me——"

"O yes."

"And will therefore be sure that I should say nothing to him for the mere sake of making peace, when there were likelihood of no real peace, but that I shall speak to him as truthfully as I would to my own son."

"But what would you say, uncle?" asked Margaret, with a *naïveté* that under other circumstances might have excited a smile.

"This, dear Maggie, as from you——"

She drew herself together, and seemed about to speak, but restrained herself.

"That having taken counsel with one who loves you as well as he loves his own child, you have allowed yourself to be convinced that nothing which had occurred before you left St. John's Wood justified that step—that you regret it, and desire that it may be pardoned, and that you may be allowed to retract it."

Margaret's lips were now so strongly compressed that you would never imagine they could form themselves into that beautiful smile of which mention has been made. Nevertheless, they opened.

"You would say this from me, Uncle Henry?"

"I should say that from you, Margaret. But, as you well know, I should say so only after you had made me the request that I should so speak. What else I, as an old man, and one who loves you dearly, and hoped to love your husband for your sake, may say from my own heart to that husband, upon the subject of the past and the future, you may safely leave to my affection. What I may, if I have the happiness to succeed, have to say to you too, dear child, upon the new life which you will then undertake, may perhaps best be kept until then; but I would have you, Margaret, take advantage of my absence to have some self-communings—on your knees."

Loving one another earnestly, there they were in antagonism. He, taught by his religion, was treating as a false pride that which she, taught by her heart, was vindicating as a true one.

"And now, dear Margaret, authorize your uncle to speak in your name."

"Uncle Henry," said Mrs. Arundel, with firmness, "there are no words in which I can tell you how grateful I am to you for your kindness. Even in your own bitter sorrow you give yourself up to me."

"You shall thank me another time, love; now I want only to know that I may go."

"Will you ever—will you ever forgive me when I tell you that this must not be—at least not now, and in the way that you wish?"

"I have had all the truth told me, I repeat," said Cheriton; "I am sure that I have had all the truth."

"All the truth, dearest uncle, yes," said Margaret, taking his hand, "all except what never can be told, at least in any words that I know how to use. How can I tell you of what I have suffered? I do not mean

from any actual wrong to me, except the greatest wrong of all to loving heart, the not getting loved in return. As for Philip's neglect of me, that might have been hard to bear, but the weary days and nights I have passed alone and in sorrow were nothing to me while I believed that he loved me, and that one day I should have all his affection. I have cried over my poor sleeping baby till he waked with the dropping of my tears, and smiled at me, and the smile seemed to say that there was hope for me, and happiness. I would have borne, waited, and been silent until it pleased God to give me back my husband's heart, and then when he opened his arms I would have erept to them like a child, and wept my own heart out for joy and gratitude. But, O! dear Unele Henry, to have all my hopes blotted out at once, to learn that my husband's love had been given elsewhere, and that the utmost I could look to was his courtesy—to feel that all the affection I lavished upon him was distasteful, or perhaps tolerable, as it reminded him of other caresses; O, dearest friend that I have in the world—will *you* say to me that I have not been humbled, and that I am to ask for more humility?" And she threw herself into his arms, and wept aloud.

It might be that there was conflict in the bosom of Henry Cheriton between the instincts of nature and the dictates of piety. He might have been about to attempt to administer worldly comfort to poor Margaret, as she clung sobbingly to him, or he might have been preparing to whisper some of the inspired consolations which he had often proved and tried as sure balm under affliction. But he was spared all need of speech of either kind.

The Ayah stood before them.

"Boosey, you!" exclaimed Mr. Cheriton, astonished. And Margaret, brushing some of the tears from her face, looked up with equal surprise.

"My poor Miss Maggie," said the Indian, casting herself at the feet of Mrs. Arundel, and embracing her knees. "My poor, poor, Miss Maggie."

Margaret stooped and imprinted an affectionate kiss on the dark forehead of the Ayah, and then sought to raise her. But she continued to cling to her mistress's knees, and to repeat her words of commiseration.

Mr. Cheriton's surprise speedily gave way to his habitual self-possession. Something has been told the faithful old creature, at St. Oscars, about Margaret's being unhappy, he thought, and she has come up designing to be useful. Like myself, he inwardly added, and perhaps to as good purpose.

"Now, Boosey," he said, "get up; Mrs. Arundel is ill, and you will make her worse if you go on so."

The fear of doing Margaret the least harm had its usual effect upon the Ayah, and in a moment she was on her feet, and wiping her eyes with energy; but her lips still murmured "poor Miss Maggie."

"What brought you to town, Boosey?" said Mr. Cheriton.

The Ayah smiled very sadly, and silently pointed at Margaret.

"How kind of you, dear nurse," said Mrs. Arundel.

But the Indian, with a beckoned wave of her hand, disclaimed the idea of having done anything worth thanks.



"You called at my house?" asked Cheriton; "you left all well?"

"I did not go," said Boosey, whose mind seemed pre-occupied.

"Let me speak you, Doctor," she said, signalling him, but with much respect, towards the other drawing-room.

"Can you have anything to tell me that Mrs. Arundel should not hear?"

"I do not want to tell you nothing; I want to speak you"

"This way, then;" and they entered the adjacent room.

"Now, what is it, Boosey?—quick, please."

"O, very quick—quick as death! Tell me. A Christian has marry two wives at one time?"

"Nonsense, Boosey; no Christian could do such a thing. Besides, no man can do it; the second woman is no wife at all."

"Quite well. Then, the first woman is killed—no, she dies; the other woman is the wife now, the lady and mistress of all?"

"No, certainly not; unless he marries her again."

"Ah! he must marry her again?"

"Well, no, he is not obliged; but he will, or else he is a scoundrel."

"Quite well, Doctor;" and Boosey returned to the room in which Margaret was.

Mrs. Arundel had seated herself in one of the large chairs, and the Ayah came behind her, and, with the soft and gentle touches of Eastern handmaids, began arranging Margaret's lovely hair, smoothing tresses into braids, and severing braids into tresses again, as in the days of the childhood of her charge.

"Mr. Philp is not a scoundrel?" she suddenly murmured, questioningly, in the ear of Margaret.

Mrs. Arundel started, and then, perceiving the point of the inquiry, coloured all over face and neck. The Ayah kissed her, apologetically, and looked for a reply.

"No, no, Boosey," said Margaret, hastily. "No."

"Quite well," said the Ayah, resuming her work upon the hair.

Mr. Cheriton re-entered the room, and looked at Boosey as if desirous to dismiss her for the moment. She instantly understood the look, and said that she would go downstairs to the servants.

"What made you ask me those questions in the next room?" said Cheriton.

The Ayah looked gloomily, and made no reply.

"Tell me, Boosey," persisted Cheriton; "if you know any poor woman who has been wronged, we may be better able to help her than you."

"No, no, I know her not," said Boosey, impatiently; "I do not know nothing. Miss Maggie, please to ring for me."

And she left the room.

Margaret instantly mentioned to her uncle the words which the Ayah had whispered, and which the former supposed to be merely Boosey's mode of obtaining comfort for herself touching her beloved mistress's position.

"Ha! was that her question?" said Cheriton and he hurried to the bell, and rang it violently.

It was answered by one of Mr. Keckling's servants ; but the Ayah's immediate attendance was ordered, and, whether with good will or not, Boosey obeyed.

"I desire to know, Boosey," said Mr. Cheriton, "why you asked me those questions?"

"No why. Nothing," returned the Ayah.

"Mrs. Arundel desires to know."

"Better not know, Miss Maggie—not now. By and bye."

"Please to tell me now, Boosey," said Margaret, who saw that her uncle was more than usually desirous of having his way.

"The Doctor knows what I tell," said the Ayah, "and what he tell—marry her again, or he is a scoundrel."

"Who is?" demanded Cheriton.

"Nobody is," replied the Ayah, triumphantly ; "Miss Maggie tell me."

"What does this mean?" asked Cheriton, sternly. "Speak out, Boosey, and let us have no shuffling. What has Mr. Philip Arundel to do with your question? What has he done?"

"I seen his wife," said Boosey, "and his child—a nasty, ugly child—very ugly girl—yes. But he is not a scoundrel, and all shall be quite well," and she made a motion towards the door.

But Cheriton stopped her, and by dint of questioning, and the free use of Margaret's name, he elicited from her that which the reader already knows, namely, that Alban had taken her into a house and shown her the wife and child of Philip Arundel.

"But she will soon die," said Boosey, consolingly.

Permitted, by a sign, to depart, she left the room, waving her hand as if in congratulation to Margaret.

"What new revelation is this, my child?" said her uncle, hastening to her side ; "the idea of another wife is, of course, sheer idiocy, but——"

"But there is a child," said Margaret, bursting into tears again, perhaps the bitterest she had shed that day ; "there is a child ! That was never known to me ; and now, now I can see why my own darling was looked coldly on—why his father never cared to see, and to kiss him. The love that should have been my child's belongs to another child—hers to whom that letter was written. I used to think," she went on, passionately, "that if he could love our baby, I would not so much care about myself ; but he never could, and now I know why. Her child ! O, Uncle Henry ! this last blow was all that was wanting. O, I am so wretched ! Her child ! Now, Uncle Henry, will you have me pray to be more humbled?"

"Dearest love, be calm. You have only the word of an ignorant woman, grossly deceived as to one point——"

"But not the other. She has been taken to that woman's house, and has seen her and her girl. A girl, too, and Philip always—Dearest uncle, do not try to comfort me by the thought that there may be mistake. Boosey has seen Philip's child, and now I know why he cared nothing for my darling Duke ; there could be no other reason for his neglecting that little angel. For *her* child !"

The dark hour of all is the hour before day.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

## AN OPEN COUNCIL.

It had long been Alban Cheriton's intention to produce upon his cousin Margaret's mind the effect mentioned in the preceding chapter. But he had laid a complicated plot, designing that Margaret's own eyes should deceive her into the belief that she beheld the child of Philip Arundel. It was, however, entirely in keeping with the rest of his conduct, and in natural obedience to the disorderly dictates of his brain, that he should forestal his plan on suddenly encountering the Ayah; and no sooner had he achieved his purpose, and furnished Boosey with Margaret's address (of which he was certain that she would immediately avail herself), than, with the singular readiness of madness, instantly to convert to its own use the idea last presented to it, Alban chuckled and rejoiced to himself at the adroitness he had manifested, and departed muttering incoherent exultation that at last he had fulfilled his work. Strangers who passed him, and saw the fine face distorted with occasional grimace, wondered, supposed him insane, and forgot him; but some who knew the celebrated lecturer's features, watched him with more interest, and imagined that he was puzzling over some abstruse theory, or some professional problem, and actually entertained an increased respect for a genius that was so visibly superior to the usages of the world—one of the thousand cases in which a little knowledge leadeth us further astray than doth total ignorance.

John Claxton had, as it will easily be supposed, deemed it best to get rid of the pertinacious Ayah by giving any kind of promise that was likely to place her upon the other side of his black door, nor would he have particularly troubled himself to fulfil an engagement made, as he described it, under *duress*. In fact, it was one of Mr. Claxton's ideas that as the lower orders attach little or no value to exact truth, their betters need be troubled with few scruples about administering to them an article which they do not appreciate. John Claxton never romanced, either to or about one of his equals, and was indeed curiously exact in his statements in conversation. But the remarkable calmness with which he addressed to his inferiors any allegation which occurred to him as likely to be pleasant to them, or to promote any object he had for the moment in view, was worthy of all admiration, and may perhaps be one of the reasons why he has, since the time of our story, been so eminently successful as a canvasser and a hustings speaker. Far be it from me to imply that to his other characteristic he is likely to be indebted for a failure in the House to which we all aspire.

But Mr. Claxton, though performing the office of a friend in consoling with and comforting Philip Arundel, and in some measure diverting him from considerations which were really working upon his mind to its improvement, but to the detriment of his health, was much dissatisfied with the position of affairs. He had done his best

or worst, as we know, to dissuade Arundel from marrying, but having failed, and having seen Philip mated with youth, beauty, and gentleness, John Claxton was enraged with his friend for not accepting a situation that was not, after all, so very disagreeable, and behaving himself in married life with steadiness and loyalty. He was very anxious to heal the breach between Margaret and Philip, and therefore detained the latter in England, instead of allowing him to shoot off to Paris or Baden. But the means did not come to his hand, and his inventive powers were not of the strongest. Of course he soon ascertained all that there was to know, and Mrs. Arundel's return to Mr. Keckling's was at once signified to him. There was the man in the Temple, and the woman in the Regent's Park; but the problem how to bring them together was still unsolved. The Ayah's visit to the young lawyer's chambers was, therefore, not unwelcome to him; for, at all events, it offered him an opportunity of an explanatory visit to Keckling—perhaps to Margaret.

Without consulting Philip, therefore, Mr. Claxton resolved to see how the land lay, and in the afternoon following the visit of Boosey, he went up to Mr. Keckling's house. But he thought that it might not be amiss first to call in Thanington Square, where he was always welcome. He was indeed looked upon as a sort of *custos* to Philip, and though the latter had not unnaturally chosen to separate himself a good deal from his family since the late events of which we have spoken, Mr. Arundel and the girls kept up an indirect communication with him through Claxton, and seemed to hold the latter responsible that Philip did nothing wild or desperate.

To-day Blanche and Geraldine were out, but Mr. Arundel was in his library, reading hard in Hansard for hints for a speech he had persuaded himself that he ought to make. He sadly needed Philip to string together for him the points which he was rather feebly noting on the back of a glossy letter with a very thick lead pencil that wrote hard and badly. John Claxton's arrival was an excuse to the senator for laying aside work in which his old soul did not delight, and for which it need hardly be said there was not the least real necessity, for the bill against which he meant to speak had been introduced by the Government without the smallest intention of its being passed, and only to shut the mouth of Sir Barnabas Gutch (who would have otherwise brought in a much better), and it was born with an "I" mark on its back, setting it apart for slaughter on Innocents' day. The country, therefore, practically lost nothing by Mr. Claxton's interruption.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Claxton," said the old gentleman, looking what he declared himself to be, a trouble few people take. "I had half made up my mind to send you a note."

Claxton was happy, of course, and what could he do?

"Well, the fact is, Claxton," said the father, "and I dare say you can perfectly well understand it without my saying much about it, we are all very uncomfortable about Philip, and the way he is going on. I don't mean, of course, to say for a moment that if he is not in his own house, or mine, he is in the next best place in the world, with your companionship."

"My dear sir, I feel exactly as you do in the matter, and I think that he decidedly ought to be in his own house, or yours."

"I knew you would say so. Now the girls fancy all sorts of things about him,—that he must be growing melancholy and misanthropical, and, perhaps—you know what girls' imaginations are—that he is likely to get into a bad way, as a purposeless unhappy man will. I don't mean to say, of course, that I have any such fancies about him ; but I don't like to see Blanche and Geraldine making themselves miserable with the idea."

This, it should be said, was an entirely unfair representation of the case, for though Philip's sisters were much grieved at losing sight of him, they never imagined anything very sentimental on the subject, and it was the dear old Marmaduke himself who suggested all the uncomfortableness, and then fidgeted himself therewith.

"Philip is not particularly unwell," said the scrupulous John Claxton, "but it is a bad thing for a man to be in his position, and I often hear him declare himself bored to death."

He did not mention that the last time he had heard Philip so describe himself was on the previous evening in the middle of a drama which on the play-bill in his hand was termed comic.

"Poor boy !" said Mr. Arundel. "His situation is most unfortunate, and I really see no immediate mode of altering it for him. How sadly events have turned out, my dear John Claxton, and how differently from what we hoped and expected when I held his hand at that wedding breakfast, and believed that all I prayed for was coming to pass."

And tears stood in the father's eyes.

"We will hope to have it all right for him yet," said Claxton.

"It will be a happy day for me when I see it so, my dear lad," replied the other.

"At least, I will tell him what you say."

"I hope that there is no need to tell Philip that," said Mr. Arundel ; "and yet say so—do, please ; for he may be led at times to think that we are not thinking of him. God knows that is not so. I can answer for myself, and I am sure I can answer for my girls."

"And I for Philip that he never doubts it. But everybody likes a kind word now and then."

"Very true ; and I have sometimes thought that if more kind words were said, people who love one another well would love one another better."

He was thinking of Philip and Margaret, for, to tell the truth, the kindly natured old man had not been well pleased with his son's calm politeness to his warm-hearted wife in the days when the estrangement was increasing, and Arundel knowing nothing of its causes.

"May I ask," said Claxton, "whether you have ever heard anything of or from Mrs. Philip?"

"Not a syllable," said Arundel. "That is, not a syllable directly. You know what respectable person did me the honour to send me a telegraphic message from Hastings?"

"Yes, but Mrs. Philip has long since returned to town."

"I did not know it. And I think I ought to have known it. She

knew well how I always loved her, and it did not need Philip's explanatory letter to me, to assure me that there was nothing more than a case of temper in it, and that she was not much to blame. Does she think I would have been harsh with her, or taken even my own son's part against her?"

"I beg pardon," said Claxton. "Philip wrote to you?"

"Nothing very surprising in that, is there—that he should write to his father, explaining the quarrel, and begging that no interference might take place?"

"And—and—" asked Claxton, eagerly, "taking care that as little blame as possible fell on his wife?"

"Yes; and there is nothing very surprising in that, either," said Arundel, a little proudly. "Philip has his faults; but he is as just as ever gentleman was, or could be."

"He never told me," said Jack Claxton, with real pleasure in his face; "and yet he tells me most things. But that's nothing between us. I am as glad as if you had given me a great heap of money."

"Tell me why, if you do not mind."

"Oh, because it shows that, in spite of gloomy looks and despairing talk, he is certain of a reconciliation one of these days, and would be rejoiced at it."

"You read it in that light? I am very glad to hear you say so; for, to tell you the truth, so do I. And, the hope of seeing them happy again, and that darling boy of theirs on his father's knee, is a thing that I look forward to with a desire which you don't understand, Mr. Claxton, and it is impossible that you should; but you will when your head is as white as mine, and you have a son to trouble it."

"I am thoroughly pleased," said John Claxton.

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I am sorry to say, all their kind feelings were thrown away. It was perfectly true that Philip had written that letter to his father, upon discovering that Margaret had departed. It was written when his better nature was aroused, and he secretly admitted to himself that he had been no model husband.

But, after he had despatched that letter, came the interview with Alban, and all its poison.

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"Yes," Mr. Arundel said, "I confess to you, Mr. Claxton, that I have been something more than surprised that Mrs. Arundel has not written to me. There are reasons—purely reasons of feeling, but quite strong enough to justify me in saying so—why she should have placed the most implicit confidence in me. I was quite prepared to believe that Philip was in the wrong rather than his wife."

"Every one of your friends and hers, sir, was aware how high Mrs. Arundel stood in your estimation."

"Stands, if you like, Mr. Claxton. At all events, I will form no judgment against her without the fullest understanding of the quarrel."

But as she will not write to me, and Philip keeps away, only begging that I will not interfere, I am stranded."

"There is one thing that occurs to me as possibly accounting for Mrs. Arundel's silence. You have alluded to the person in whose charge she seems to have placed herself."

"Her father? Well, I do not know that we are justified in going even so far as that. I cannot think she placed herself in his hands. I need not tell you what he is, or how little chance she would have of escaping his pertinacious persecution; and in the absence of all proof that she willingly allied herself with him, I prefer to think that she is unwillingly brought into his society. I would soon have settled all that, but for Philip's earnest request that I would not act."

"Well, sir," said Claxton, "I am glad to take the same view, but it comes in support of what I was going to say. That Mr. Spencer interdicted her from writing to you?"

"But you say that she has returned to town—do I understand that her father is with her?"

"Most unlikely, for the reason that she is in the house of a man who would be delighted to hang Mr. Armandale Spencer, I mean Mr. Keckling."

"Margaret there," said the old gentleman, with glistening eyes. "That is well. I might have guessed that she would be. I tell you what, Claxton, spite of Philip, or rather in order to do the best thing in the world for Philip, I will go and see Mrs. Arundel. It can do no harm."

"It may do great good, on the contrary," said Claxton, "and I am very happy to hear you say you will."

"By George! I'll go now; now, upon the instant."

"To tell you the truth, I was going myself to see Mr. Keckling, for a reason which I will mention."

"I'll take you—mention it as we go along." And he rang for the brougham.

He was reminded that the young ladies had it, and were gone for a morning with Mr. Albert Smith on Mont Blanc.

"We won't wait for the carriage. A cab."

Claxton told him, *en route*, of the visit of the Ayah to the chambers, and of her frantic demand that justice should be done to Miss Maggie.

Now Mr. Arundel, with all his merits, had a belief in his own power of seeing a few inches further into a mill-stone than his neighbours could, and thought he beheld an opportunity of exerting his lynx faculty.

"That is a very curious thing, Mr. Claxton. That is more than curious, it is very suggestive. Did not you two lawyers make anything out of the fact of the black woman's visit?"

"I don't know that we made more of it than it was very ill-timed, and rather outrageous."

"Ah! But we old fellows have a habit of putting this and that together. I wonder it did not strike you that this woman is in league with Armandale Spencer. He was her former master;

Margaret has told me about her, and these Eastern people's idea of service is that it lasts for life. You may rely upon it that Spencer has got hold of Mrs. Blackey, and that he is using her as a spy."

"She believes that she is doing Mrs. Arundel service, then," said Claxton, "and she would tear Mr. Spencer's eyes out if she thought he was employing her to injure her mistress's interests. I never saw a helpless-looking woman so suddenly transform herself into a she-tiger in my life. I don't believe those folks are our fellow creatures, not a bit of it. They have some cross of the lower creation in them, and ought to be treated as if they had."

"Well, do you know," said Mr. Arundel, in rather a confidential voice, "I have had that idea all my life, but it won't do to utter it in these days of universal philanthropy. We shall have a black Mr. Speaker one of these fine mornings."

"Why not, you have a black-Rod," laughed Claxton. "The first to the left, cabman. Third door. Here we are."

Mr. Keckling was at home, and in his parlour, nursing his great white cat, and reading through a file of the *Journal of Odessa*, a print that would scarcely repay that trouble on the part of most people, but in which he found notice of the proceedings and promotions of divers acquaintance of his own. He was privately glad to see his visitors, but he did not permit them to discover this, and to Mr. Arundel he showed rather a studied courtesy, as wishing to be on guard until he knew what line was to be adopted towards his darling Margaret.

"It is hardly necessary to tell you, Mr. Keckling, upon what subject we have desired to see you," said Arundel, after the ordinary commonplaces of a call; "and I am quite sure that you will feel as I do about the state of affairs between two young persons very near to our hearts."

Mr. Keckling nodded intelligence, but internally reserved to himself the right of limiting his care about the matter to what concerned one young person.

"And I am equally sure that you will be as delighted as myself to help to put an end to that state of affairs."

"That," said Mr. Keckling, quietly, "depends upon the sort of end that is to be put to them."

"Of course it does," replied Arundel; "but I think Mr. Keckling will take it for granted that my object is the same as his."

"I have avowed no object at all," returned Keckling. "But to be as frank with you, Mr. Arundel, as I ought to be towards a gentleman whose character I esteem so highly, I should be glad to understand the position we respectively occupy before I talk about the business."

Mr. Arundel was taken a little aback, but he said—

"Is there any difficulty about that?"

"If I seem to see any," replied Mr. Keckling, "you must pardon my excess of caution. We old mercantile men, you know, Mr. Arundel, have not all the open-heartedness of our betters, the aristocrats."



Arundel was not much more pleased with the second speech than the first. But he laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, we won't discuss social questions and prejudices, but try whether we cannot hammer out some plan for bringing our two young folks together again, Mr. Keckling. That I am sure will gratify you."

"Again, Mr. Arundel, I must decline to commit myself. That is, unless I know exactly how we stand."

"Perhaps you would explain a little," said John Claxton.

"I mean this," said Keckling. "A lady is under my roof, whom circumstances and conduct which I don't care to designate, have compelled to leave the house of her husband. I am willing, and, indeed, shall be happy to discuss any plan for her advantage, but I should like to know whether I am to discuss it with two gentlemen who come on another gentleman's part, or whether we are a mere open council without sides to take, or interests to advocate."

This, thought Mr. Claxton, is tolerably plain speaking, considering that she ran away from him, not he from her. Further, he thought, the old parliament-man must love Margaret a good deal, or he would hardly let such very high ground be taken by her friend.

Mr. Arundel was piqued, but his heart was too true to let his temper have the victory where the interests of those he loved were concerned.

"Open council, by all means, Mr. Keckling, and no advocacy at all. Our affections are, I think, too deeply engaged in the subject to allow us any formalities or hesitations. The point is, how can we best bring Philip Arundel and Margaret his wife into union again."

"You have satisfied yourself, then, Mr. Arundel, that such a re-union is the object at which their friends should aim?"

"Surely it is. Two young folks, in every way calculated to make each other happy, and who I believe sincerely love one another, are separated by some trumpery misunderstanding, and would be grateful for life to the friends who should once more place them in one another's arms. What do you think the shortest way to such a consummation?"

"Well, sir, in the ordinary affairs of life, we should know what to do. We should either say, of two quarrelling parties, that both have been wrong, and they must mutually forgive and forget; or we should say that one had been wrong, decide which one, and desire that one to express regret and receive pardon."

"Just so. Well, we won't talk about pardon, because that is a grave word, rather too grave to apply to boy-and-girl mistakes."

"But we certainly will not talk about mutual forgiveness, because that implies that both have been wrong, which of course is not the case here. So that neither plan seems to suit the emergency."

"Why," said Mr. Arundel, a little ruffled, "I allow, of course, and do so very cheerfully, that dear Margaret has not been in the wrong. Still it was rather a strong step to break up her household and leave her home; and therefore I think that if we suggest that no more shall be said about it, and we ask the young folks to dine at my house to-morrow, the affair will be made up in the quietest and simplest way."

"We are at cross-purposes, Mr. Arundel, that is quite evident."

"Nay, I hope not."

"I imagine so, however. At all events, if this were not open council, and I were seriously arranging the terms on which Mr. and Mrs. Arundel were to meet, I should say that I was sure we misunderstood one another. And that we might not do so any more, I should premise, that not only has Mrs. Arundel done no wrong, but has done what was most perfectly and absolutely right, and that not only has Mr. Arundel done much wrong, but that I cannot see how anything short of the fullest acknowledgment of his misconduct, and the amplest apology for it, could justify Mrs. Arundel in even listening to terms of any kind."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Arundel, now extremely red up to the roots of his silver hair, "if I have thoroughly misunderstood your sentiments towards my son."

"I have never explained them to you yet," replied Keckling, "nor would I willingly give you pain, under any circumstances."

Mr. Arundel's bow was haughty enough this time.

"I would say one thing," said John Claxton, who privately owned the justice of Keckling's views, but who felt, *pro tempore*, as the retained counsel for Philip's father. "Setting aside the right and wrong of the case for a moment, Mr. Keckling, you know, as a man of the world, that no real union could ever be effected by such means as you speak of. What is the position of the husband who has had to sue to his wife for forgiveness?"

"Is it so humiliating? He has sued to her in his time for a far greater favour—her love. But I do not deny what you say, Claxton; and you are right in believing that most people would be but indifferently re-united on such terms."

"Then, why not let us adjust easier ones?"

"Allow me to speak," said Mr. Arundel, with dignity. "I am perhaps the person most interested here, as I am speaking of my son, while Mr. Keckling and Mr. Claxton speak of their friends. Mr. Keckling has, of course, formed his idea of the nature of the quarrel—if I am to use such a word—from the statements of the dear lady up-stairs. She is as candid and true as an angel, but she cannot fail to have given her own, perhaps mistaken, opinions on her grievances. I have seen nobody, heard nobody; my only communication from my son being an exculpation of Margaret from any graver error than temper——"

Mr. Keckling interpolated an oath, but in an undertone, and Mr. Arundel was not obliged to hear it, so did not, and went on.

"And a request that I would not interfere. I am anxious to believe everything to be in Mrs. Arundel's favour, but I cannot permit my son to be condemned unheard, far less that humiliation should be exacted from him."

"And a request, if I heard you aright, sir," said Keckling, not noticing the last words, "that you would not interfere?"

"Which, in my love for them both, I have now resolved to disregard," said the old man.

"You see, sir, you come to a congress without credentials," said

Mr. Keekling ; "but that I should not insist upon. But the additional insult to Mrs. Arundel, in her husband's letter to you—you said a letter——"

"I meant it."

"That insult deliberately written down—and mind, if I do not give it another and a coarser name, it is out of reverence for the feelings of the writer's father—completes the impossibility of any sort of compromise."

"Now, Mr. Keekling, I must make a remark which I have reserved. I was desirous to adjust this reconciliation through an old and valued friend of Margaret's ; but, since you take up the position you do, I am compelled to request that you do not interpose between myself and my daughter-in-law."

"Who is my adopted daughter !"

"I rejoice in her good fortune. But she is still my son's wife, and therefore his father, who has always shown himself hers, has a claim to her affection and even duty. At all events, I must have an interview with her."

"It must be with her consent, and with mine."

"I will not turn aside to squabble upon words, Mr. Keekling. Let me see Margaret."

"No," said Mr. Keekling, suddenly becoming flushed, and speaking furiously, "you shall not see Margaret. I comprehend you, sir. You have no doubt of your power and influence, if you can only get to speak with the girl. You know well what you will say. You will be dignified and impressive enough, as becomes the aristocrat dealing with his inferior. You will remind her of the honour which has been conferred upon the child of a disreputable Indian officer, and the *protégée* of a pack of dissenters and lodging-house keepers, and of an old snob of a retired tradesman, in elevating her to be the wife of a son of the great Mr. Arundel. You will point out to her that she ought not, for the sake of her heart and her happiness, and trifles of that sort, to sink back into the Slough of plebeian Despond ; but if her husband is a profligate and a scoundrel she must overlook all that, and be proud to walk about in company with his sisters, and be received by their friends. And perhaps you will appeal to her motherly love, and ask whether that lovely child of hers is to be brought up among the lower orders and made a clerk or a shopman, when he might be put into the Fusileer Guards and marry a title. Sir, you have given Margaret a bad husband. Do you think that favour gives you the right to tempt her back into a wretched life ? You shall not see Margaret."

"Mr. Keekling," said Arundel, whose eyes had flashed at a part of this sudden onslaught, but who had now recovered himself, and spoke gravely and almost sadly, "you make me indeed pity poor Margaret, if she be really under the influence of one who can speak as you have just spoken. Whether she be under that influence or not, I will take another opportunity of testing. This interview cannot, of course, be protracted." He drew on his gloves, and rose.

"Nay, I am an old man, like yourself, Arundel," said Mr. Keekling, passionately, "and I have but one darling in the world. If I spoke

unjustly to you, forgive me. But you shall not take her away to give her back to your worthless boy."

"You speak falsely of him," said the indignant father. "He is not worthless, he is a noble fellow. If you slander him to his wife, for your own selfish purposes, the guilt be on your own head."

"I slander *him*?" repeated Keckling, scornfully.

"I believe that you are purposely keeping open and widening the breach. Do I blame you for loving Margaret? No, who can help loving her? But it is not love that separates a woman from her lawful husband, to make her the companion of your own weary hours. That is selfishness of the vilest type. But I will not discuss such a matter with you. I am glad to have had an insight into the practices by which the young couple are kept apart."

"On my honour, on my soul, Mr. Arundel," returned Keckling, almost humbly, "you wrong me. Margaret left her husband after a long series of insults and almost cruelties, brought to a climax by the discovery that his love had been given to a kept mistress; by whom, as we have just learned, he has a child."

"This may or may not be true," said Mr. Arundel, abashed, and uncertain what to reply. "Mr. Claxton, you are Philip's friend."

"Insults and cruelties are words I will not adopt," said Claxton. "Philip neglected his wife most unwisely, and I do not hesitate to say, most unfairly. He was much attached to a girl who had lived under his protection for some years before his marriage; but the connexion was of course broken off at the proper time, and a settlement made upon her. I do not believe that he has seen her since, and the story about the child is simply a lie."

It would not have been quite out of nature, as times go, that a father should know something of this part of the private history of his son; but Mr. Arundel had been kept completely in the dark by Philip (who had a certain delicate feeling—not as to the fact, but as to the fact being known—that he was in the habit of transferring himself from the society of his sisters to that of a mistress, or *vice versa*), and the whole revelation took him by the extremest surprise. He looked deeply grieved and hurt.

"We have a witness in the house at this moment," said Keckling, "who will tell you that the child is in existence, and who has seen it within the last few hours."

"Who is that?" asked Claxton, sharply.

"Mrs. Arundel's old Indian nurse; they call her Boosey. I can summon her, if you will not take my word."

"Ah!" said Mr. Arundel, catching at any gleam of hope that Philip might be less to blame than had been supposed, "What did I tell you, coming along in the cab? That woman is in a plot with Armandale Spencer, and here is a proof of it—she comes to slander my son."

"No," said Claxton, "Spencer's interest would be to keep Philip and Margaret together. His game is spoiled, if he has not that hold over you."

"It is a slander," insisted the father.

"There is more than enough without it," said Mr. Keckling, "to

justify my solemn assurance to you, Mr. Arundel, that no earthly influence will ever again place Margaret in the arms of your son."

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

## CALYPSO MORITURA.

THE group was about to break up when a footman entered and put a written visiting card into Mr. Keckling's hand.

"I don't know the name," he said, impatiently.

"The lady *must* see you, sir," was the servant's reply.

"Must?"

"I have not seen her before, sir; but she is quite a lady," said the man, in that tone which servants in whom their masters have confidence use only when they have a good reason for using it, and the reason the domestic in question had was not a bad one, and was safe in the pocket of his livery waistcoat.

"I shall be disengaged presently," said Mr. Keckling, in an undertone.

"I am going," said Mr. Arundel, coldly.

"Is Mr. Arundel's carriage at the door?" asked Mr. Keckling, louder.

"I hope that he will allow it to wait a few minutes," said a lady, entering the apartment, with a somewhat humbler salutation than a lady was likely to make under the circumstances.

The three gentlemen looked surprised, as was natural, but Mr. Arundel and Mr. Keckling saw a stranger; Mr. Claxton did not.

"Excuse intrusion," said Maria Prescott, who had assumed something of an extra flippancy in order to conceal a real timidity. "One gentleman of the three knows me, and perhaps will do himself the honour of introducing me."

"Mrs. Prescott?" said Keckling, interruptively, looking at the card.

"Ask me again and I'll tell you the same," said Maria; "but I don't mean you, sir. If Mr. John Claxton is not too ashamed of having known objectionable parties to explain who I am, perhaps he will have the goodness to do so."

Now, Mr. John Claxton had, as has been intimated in the earlier part of this story, no particular sympathy with females in a false position, unless they also happened to be ladies. And he felt no small indignation with Maria for intruding herself into a respectable house. So he answered, in no very indulgent manner,

"I do not think that you had better appeal to me for a character."

"And who the deuce appealed to you for a character?" was the prompt rejoinder. "If I wanted a character I should hardly go for one to a bricless barrister, up a dozen flights of stairs in the Temple, who don't pay his rent and his coal bill, and owes for allrounders. A pretty recommendation to a decent family wanting a finishing governess his would be."

Men tell their male friends that of course they never let out any-

thing to their wives, or other lady friends, and no doubt Philip Arundel would have repudiated the idea of having ever said a word out of chambers about things that went on in them. But nevertheless it is marvellous to find how well informed the female world is about all that goes on in the other.

"This," said Mr. Claxton, bitterly, "happens to be the person of whom we were just speaking."

Mr. Arundel looked at the girl with every intention of being savage, as became a father. But, somehow, words that he had a good mind to use died upon his tongue, and his gaze became that of curiosity rather than of unkindness. There was something before him—well, it was all very bad—but it was something that had been kind to his son, and loved him, and though of course Mr. Arundel ought to have shoved her out of the room, or left the contaminated atmosphere, like a respectable man and a member of the Church of England, he was not even scowling at her. How loose men's principles are!

Not so Mr. Keckling, who had seen in the course of his foreign life a great deal too much of Traviatism to be in the slightest degree shocked at the fact; but who saw in this particular Traviata simply a person who had been a means of annoying his Margaret, and for whom, therefore, he had no mercy.

"What do you want here, woman?" was his harsh inquiry.

Poor Maria's lip quivered at the speech, for, as she said a long time ago, she was not accustomed to be treated unkindly—in words. But she bore herself with some little dignity, though the painful flush on her cheek negatived all her pretence to calmness.

"If what I am going to say is not sufficient apology for my presuming to intrude," she said, "I have no other, and when I have done, you can easily put me into the street. I am only one girl, in a bad state of health, and you are three men, any one of you strong enough to throw me out of window if he likes."

Something in her tone touched Arundel to the heart, and, if it will be believed in Christian society, the father was the first to reply to the mistress of his son.

"Pray do not speak as if—pray speak as if you knew we were sure that you would not have come here without a good reason."

And I blush in the solitude of my own chamber to write it, Mr. Arundel offered her a chair.

Maria's look, at receiving this courtesy, was more grateful than Arundel believed that a look, under such circumstances, could have been. It was actually painful to him, and he fumbled with his gloves, and turned away, and tried to lose the recollection of the glance. On the whole, the man is happy, who is not haunted through life by the ghosts of a few faces, seen in single, separate moments of excitement. Mr. Arundel never forgot that look.

But Maria did not take the proffered seat, but supported herself by the back of the chair, and said,

"The doctor will not tell me—I mean a doctor you all know, Mr. Alban Cheriton—he wont tell me, I say, that my time is very short,

but he has given over prescribing for me, and lets me do as I like, and I know what that means."

The three men kept silence.

"Good riddance of bad rubbish, says you, or if you don't say it, you think it, and perhaps I think the same. But as I am going, and it is not a great many very good things I have done in my time, I should like to finish off with one that may perhaps prevent some of you from saying quite all you think of me, when I am in the churchyard. I don't know why you should not say it, for I shall be quiet enough, but I seem to want——"

A paroxysm of coughing here interrupted her, but she instantly waved her hand, as if to desire that there might be no attempt to assist her.

"Excuse the cough," she said, on recovering. "I am silencing it as fast as I can, and nobody will be troubled with it much longer."

John Claxton had many good points, and in spite of what she had said of him, he went into the next room and returned with a glass of water for her, but he protested against her presence, and herself, and the whole scene, by simply placing the glass near her hand, without a word, and without looking at her, and he resumed his seat.

"Thanks, gentle swain," said Maria. "I did not deserve it, for I spoke very rude to you." And she took rather a large draught of the water so ungraciously given.

"Now," she said, "to business. Mr. Arundel, I have never spoken to you before, but I know you well. Once when I saw you was the cruellest hour in all my life, but you did not know that I was there. Mr. Keckling was also present, and so was Mr. Claxton. So that I am acquainted with you all. But there is no one to say a word for me, and so you must please yourselves about believing what I want to tell you. Only, I am a dying woman, and I have nothing in the wide world to gain by deceiving any of you."

"We are sure that you have no such intention," said Mr. Arundel.

"If *you* would not speak to me, sir," said Maria. "It is a great liberty in me to ask it, but—there, I am dying, what does it matter? and your voice is so like—like somebody else's—please to forgive me."

He made a kindly motion of his hand, but she hastily drew her own away.

"Does anybody here know a book called *Hysterical*—stop, no, I remember it by that—*Histericomasters*, or something?"

"There is a book called *Histriomastrix*," said John Claxton.

"That is it," said Maria. "Please to remember it—I mention it while it is in my head, for it goes out of my head for days and days together. Why not write it down, says you, but somehow it never comes to me when I have got a pen and ink. But it is safe now. Remember, also, the fifth shelf from the ground. Now that's all safe, thank you."

"The fifth shelf, where?" asked Claxton.

"Lord! And I did not tell you that! My poor head is gone. I ought to be dead, what use am I? At Mr. Alban Cheriton's, the doctor's. Now it is all safe, and I may take it easy."

Mr. Arundel looked earnestly at Claxton, as if to discover whether the poor thing before them were really in the possession of her senses, and Claxton responded by a grave look and nod, implying that they had better listen.

"Mr. Arundel, let me speak to you, but please not to answer me. I am sure you will let me. I am not going to say anything that might displease you about—about——"

"Mr. Arundel's son," supplied John Claxton. "If you like to pass over anything unpleasant, Mrs. Prescott, and conclude that Mr. Arundel knows all that you can tell him——"

"I know that he does not, then, nor you neither, Mr. Claxton, or else I should not be here. Please to let me tell my story my own way."

"I really spoke only to save you pain."

"It is rather late in my poor life for pain to be saved to me, and a little more or less wont signify."

They waited for her to resume, after another coughing fit, which seemed to shake her very being.

"Mr. Alban Cheriton is a very great scoundrel."

Mr. Keckling started. He had not seen Henry Cheriton, but he knew what had passed between Alban and Margaret, and was indisposed to take Margaret's view of her cousin's state of mind. In fact, the moment anybody annoyed her in any way, her fretful friend conceived a hostility against that person, which became utterly uncharitable.

"I am inclined to think you speak truth there," he said. "I would have turned you out of the house for saying it, a few days ago."

"Do it now, if you like," said Maria, "for I have not a friend in the world to take my part. You may ill-use me very safely."

Mr. Arundel would not speak, but he touched her hand for a moment.

"Well, perhaps I have a friend, but I am sure it is one I don't ought to have. I will not give him much trouble." She said this very respectfully, but without looking at Mr. Arundel.

"When you go and get that letter—you remember the book and the shelf——"

"Perfectly," said Claxton, "but you have mentioned no letter."

"The letter's in the book," cried Maria. "O my head, it had better be burned, as that black woman wished."

"And what is the letter?" asked Claxton, desirous to bring the interview to a point.

"The letter is one of a great many," said Maria, slowly, and as if she was resolved, this time, to tell a coherent story, "which Philip—which young Mr. Arundel wrote to *me*, in—in days that are gone and forgotten for ever. Mr. Alban Cheriton put this letter into a desk, where the young lady Mr. Philip Arundel married might be sure to find it, and be driven wild at the thought that he had loved somebody else beside herself, and wild it drove her, I hear."

This revelation came upon the three gentlemen like a thunder-stroke. Mr. Arundel was rather glad to believe it.



Mr. Keckling was ready to believe anything against Alban, since his behaviour to Margaret.

Mr. Claxton scarcely knew whether to believe or not.

"How do you know of this stratagem with the letter, Mrs. Prescott?" he asked.

"Because he told me himself. But there is more than that, and something which you may understand, though I don't. Mr. Alban Cheriton was my doctor, and though it's little good all the doctors in the world could do me, he did his best, and if I had followed his orders, I might have lasted a good bit longer than I am likely to do; but what would have been the use? But I get talking of myself, which nobody cares about, and myself least of all. Well, one day I had been to him for my medicine, and in came Mr. Philip Arundel. I was hurried into the next room, and perhaps I didn't listen, perhaps I did."

And she told, in her fragmentary way, that which has been already told.

"Something whispered me that it would be better if I did not take back that letter, which had been left on the table. So I stuck it into the book I have told you the name of—it's gone from me again—and there it will be found."

"If it is found, it only proves that you put it there," said Claxton.

"But if Mr. Philip Arundel is questioned about the conversation which he believed was secret, and if he tells you that Mr. Alban Cheriton revealed to him that, long before he married Miss—Miss—"

"Never mind, we know," said Keckling.

"Pray don't suppose I want to defile such a name by mentioning it with my objectionable lips," said Maria, with a touch of her old defiance.

"Miss Spencer," said Claxton. "Well, that long before he married——"

"That the young lady knew all and everything about a certain rascal of a father of hers——"

"Alban told Philip *that*?" exclaimed Keckling.

"Yes, you seem to understand it. I don't. But Mr. Philip Arundel was most indignant, and would not believe it."

"I should think not," said Keckling.

Mr. Arundel preserved his silence, but he listened intently.

"But he believed it at last, and perhaps you will try him by these words which have stuck in my memory, though I don't know why they should. *No, sir, ours is not a household where subjects of pain and sin are made family talk, but never were the miserable Spencers forgotten in family prayer.* That finished the business, and Philip—I mean young Mr. Arundel—went away raving. And Mr. Alban remained, smiling like a fiend. Ask about that, and find the letter, and you will have a notion, I fancy, of the sort of game that Mr. Alban Cheriton has been playing."

"How did he get the letter which you say he laid in Mrs. Arundel's way?" asked Keckling, sternly.

"I gave it him, with a great many other letters from the same to the same," replied Maria, steadily enough, but with a very pale face.

"In order to help him to do this wickedness?" said Keckling.

"No," said Maria.

"What for, then?"

"To prevent another wickedness."

"Against whom?"

"Against me."

Keckling laughed a scornful laugh, but there was no echo of it from either of his companions, and John Claxton looked exceedingly grave.

"I suppose I understand," said Mr. Keckling.

"I understand perfectly," said Claxton. Perhaps he saw that Mr. Arundel was inclined to an indulgent course, and Mr. Claxton might have his own reasons for wishing to stand well with the father of a Miss Arundel. There must be a motive power for every motion, we are told. "I may perhaps be allowed to save unpleasant recital, by stating how I comprehend all this."

"But let the woman tell her own story," said Keckling.

"Where there is an inclination to atone for wrong," said Arundel, in an under voice, yet one quite audible by Maria, "we should be considerate."

"Mr. Arundel, you are very good to me; much better than I deserve," said Maria; "but whatever I may be, I have done no wrong in this matter."

"I should like to be made to see that," said Keckling, "as it appears to me that a wickeder thing has never been done than what you admit you did."

"Allow me a moment," said Claxton. "You are aware, both of you, of the unfortunate relations that were subsisting between Philip and this lady——"

"They were not unfortunate," said Maria, earnestly. "He was very happy, so was I, and I behaved to him as well as any wife could have done. Indeed, I was his wife, and whatever the opinions of proper-minded people about breaking truth and vows may be, the poor girl that is speaking to you would have defied all the devices in the world to separate her from the man she loved, until he had ordered her to leave him."

"Don't talk about what you do not understand," said Keckling, in the highest degree offended that such a person should presume to criticize the conduct of his Perfection. "We know why it suits persons in certain positions to be faithful, or to try to be thought so."

Maria did not look defiance at him, in return for this coarseness, but merely smiled, rather sadly.

"I know my own feelings," she answered, "and it makes very little odds to me what people say to me now."

"I was going to explain," said Claxton; "and what Mrs. Prescott has said makes it all the clearer to you; that she, having, as I am sure I shall not wound her by saying, a very strong attachment for Philip Arundel, thought herself warranted in seeking, by every means in her power, to prevent his marriage."

"So she was," said Maria, firmly.

"With this view she deposited with Mr. Alban Cheriton, who

appears to have behaved in a mysterious manner, letters which she thought might, if shown to the friends of Miss Spencer, induce them to think him an undesirable suitor. But the marriage once concluded, there was not the least intention on her part to disturb its happiness, and if I see anything to blame in her subsequent conduct, it is that she neglected to obtain back those letters from Mr. Cheriton."

"A likely story," said Keckling. "But true or not, the mischief was done, and done through Mrs.—Mrs.—he looked carelessly at the card—Preston's, Prescott's means."

"And that is why she is here to bear any humiliation which gentlemen think it manly to inflict," returned the girl.

"There is no idea of humiliation, my poor girl," said Arundel, in whose nature there was going on a most objectionable struggle between pity and propriety. "If you have come here on a kindly errand, you may be quite sure that your object will be appreciated."

"I don't say that it is kind," said Maria, sobbing. In her weak, but easily excited condition, a gentle word at once melted her. "And I don't say that I came here out of any love for anybody I am likely to see here; but what does it matter, if I tell you the truth; and I have told it you, as there is a Heaven above us."

"But you have not said why you did not get back the letters," said Keckling, a little softened, but still desirous to be hostile.

"Why?" echoed Maria, "why? Because Alban Cheriton would as soon have torn the heart out of his bosom as have given me up one line of them until he had worked out his own purpose. If I had even hinted that I wanted them, or tried to get them, or told anybody that he had them, he would have strangled me. You don't seem to know Mr. Alban Cheriton."

"Do you know," said Mr. Keckling, "that Mrs. Arundel is his cousin?"

"Do I know that, and everything else in the world that concerns her? But you are fooling with me, when you pretend not to know that he has been so madly in love with her all his life, that he goes about like a wild thing now; and I don't believe at times that he is in his right senses."

This speech really fell like a shell among the party, and Maria looked more astonished than any of them at the effect she had produced. The news was startling to them all three. Mr. Arundel, of course, had been entirely uninformed of any of Alban's earlier life; and knew him only as an occasional guest, whose intellect made him a welcome one. For Mr. Keckling, he was equally taken unawares. Margaret had been far too honourable, far too superior to the vanity that induces women to boast of rejected offers, to betray the passionate advances of her cousin. She had, previously to her marriage, with unfeigned gladness seen him subordinate his feelings to the necessities of the time, congratulate her at the wedding breakfast, and afterwards become, apparently, the friend of her young husband. Had Alban ever dared to renew his advances, it is not for me to speculate upon what her course might have been, but having beheld him vanquish all outward manifestation of his love, and accept the natural position of a near and valued relative, the wife had claimed

to herself the right to forget what had been offered to the girl, and Margaret Arundel had been loyal to the unspoken promise implied in her words on the pier at Ryde; and what had never been told to her Philip was not likely to have been told to Mr. Keckling.

The only one of the three who had ever had the least inkling of the truth was John Claxton, and his knowledge had come in so indirect a way, and was so slight, that until this moment he had scarcely given the subject a thought. But he now recollected that Philip, in reporting to him some of the conversation between Alban and himself at the river-side dinner, had mentioned Alban's admission of his having had the usual disease of cousin-hood, and to his having taken it by himself, Margaret escaping. The medical allusion, appropriate to the speaker, had fixed the words in Philip's mind more than had the meaning, or he would never have remembered it at all. Now, the affectedly careless phrase came back to John Claxton.

Mr. Keckling was bewildered. He had but just heard of Alban's violent scene with Margaret, though she had said but little of its real character. But there are some truths which insist on your belief, and this one was irresistible. Yet the old man did his best, with the aid of his pride, to set up a wall and a banner against it, for he was sorely hurt that his favourite, his *protégée*, his adopted child, should have kept a secret from him. And he was angry with her for secrecy, with himself for obtuseness, with Maria for her revelation. Still, he could not meet her words with a denial to believe them.

"Nice places seem to have been selected for confidences affecting the honour and happiness of your daughter-in-law, Mr. Arundel," was the best and worst that the irritated old man could do for himself.

"Alban Cheriton's happiness was going to be destroyed by the marriage, and so was mine, and it was natural we should take counsel together," replied Maria, who seemed provokingly determined to assert her right to undergo the sufferings which a respectable woman might have sustained.

"Mr. Arundel," said Claxton, "you and I are equally astonished——"

"There is another feeling I must own to besides astonishment," said Mr. Arundel, in a tone which showed that he spoke the truth. "If this secret has been kept so well from all of us, at least it was not kept from one whom it principally concerned, I mean Mrs. Philip Arundel, and——"

"Not one word to her detriment, not one syllable," cried Keckling, energetically.

"You cannot, Mr. Keckling, be more interested than I am in putting the best interpretation upon every portion of her conduct."

"Don't breathe a doubt, Mr. Arundel, don't let one breathe itself to you, sir. Whatever Margaret has done, or not done, she will prove to have acted as becomes the noblest and the purest girl in the world."

"I am certainly disposed to suspend all judgment," said Mr. Arundel.

"Mrs. Arundel," said Claxton, "is above all blame, and a word from her would be enough."

And this, thought poor Maria, is the generous and trustful way in which this class of people deal with persons of their own rank. It's all right, quite right; but suppose she had been a governess, or a milliner, or me. But that's all right, too, no doubt.

"I suppose," said Maria, "that if I say anything about the lady, I shall be ordered to hold my tongue, and not contaminate her name by mentioning it."

"Should you speak so," said Claxton, "after what Mr. Arundel has said?"

"No," said Maria, "I should not, and I am an unthankful wretch; but I have had so little of late to thank anybody for, that I have got out of the way of behaving properly. Please to let me say what I know. Once in all his life, and as I hope for the mercy which I have no right to, I believe that it was only once in all his life, Alban Cheriton declared his love to Miss Spencer. And if you would like to know where it was, I will tell you: It was on a dark evening in the Isle of Wight, and they stood together at the end of a pier, out in the waves, and he pleaded to her like a madman; and she answered him that his pleading was utterly in vain. And if you want to know who was the witness to this, though they thought that no human eye was near them, it was a miserable woman, who was having her heart torn to pieces, and who was crouching down under some sailcloth, and listening with her heart throbbing and her eyes bursting, for some sort of hope that the lady did not love Philip Arundel, and that there was some little, last chance of that poor wretch's keeping him to herself."

The words carried conviction of their truth, and the distress of the recollection she had evoked, gave to her tearful eyes and convulsed lip so piteous an expression that Keckling himself looked compassionately at her, and as for Arundel, the confession of her intense love for his son, not only moistened his own eyes, but actually compelled him to say, with feeling,

"Poor child, poor child."

"Well, I am not much more than a child," sobbed Maria, "though I ought to be, and perhaps I should have been—never mind. But I meant to finish by saying, that at this time, the first and last that he ever dared to speak to her, his love turned to hate, and what he has since done you know."

"I really do not wish to annoy you," said Mr. Keckling, "but was it before or after that scene, which must have been while I was staying at Ryde——"

"You came on the pier, but it was cold, and you sent Alban away, and soon afterwards went away yourself, leaving Miss Spencer, which I did not understand, but I supposed that he had begged her to stop till he came back."

"No," said Keckling, jealous of even a trifle that could imply that Margaret had willingly listened. "I remember the night well. I sent him for my cloak, but we missed, and he returned for his cousin."

"Had it been as suggested, there would have been nothing strange in her consenting to remain and say a few words to an old friend," said Claxton.

Maria smiled, rather bitterly. Perhaps she had been less liberally judged in her time for some similar act, but she did not speak.

"I was going to ask," said Keckling, "whether it was before or after this interview that you deposited those letters with Cheriton?" Maria coloured all over her face and neck.

"I am here to speak the truth," she said, promptly. "It was after."

"When you knew that all must be ended between Mr. Philip and yourself?"

"Where there is love there is hope," replied Maria, in a low voice. "But it is all over now, love and hope and all, so you need not be too harsh with me; and if you are, it is all one, for the bad child has her orders to be off to the bed where she'll sleep sound enough, and forget all her troubles."

"Who is speaking harshly, or thinks of doing so?" reiterated Arundel. "Let me ask a question, if you will be so kind as to answer it."

"I guess it," said Maria. "No, thank God, nor never had, though I was once very far from thinking I should ever come to be thankful for it."

This answer completely mystified Mr. Arundel, who had certainly meant to put no question to which such a response could possibly apply; but Keckling caught at her meaning on the instant.

"Have you seen an Ayah lately?" he asked, eagerly.

"Dare say I have," said Maria, with a faint gleam of the manner which had for some time characterized her; "but I didn't know it when I saw it."

"You don't know the word—an eastern nurse—a dark woman?"

"Indeed, yes," said Maria, "and that brings me here."

"The question I was going to ask," interposed Arundel, "you seem about to answer. I am desirous to know what induces you to make these explanations?"

"A moment," said Keckling, with his hand on the bell. "It is you, then, whom this Ayah declares she has seen?"

"It is true enough. The hideous creature was brought into my room by Mr. Alban, and nearly frightened me into hysterics; which is a very easy thing to do to me now."

"It will not frighten you into hysterics to see her again, I suppose?" said Keckling, ringing.

"No," said Maria, slowly. "It will be best. But will you be sure to protect me against her, because she curses like a she-fury, and may wish to kill me, for anything I know."

"Fear nothing," said Keckling and Claxton in a breath. And the Ayah was again summoned. As she entered the room, Maria rose and went with some trepidation behind the large chair on which she had been sitting, giving, moreover, a glance at Mr. Arundel as if to assure herself of protection.

The Ayah opened the door very quietly, and to no greater distance than was necessary to let her glide into the room. A single glance showed her the visitor whose presence had caused her to be summoned, and a concentrated expression of hate instantly appeared in her face.

Her eyes glittered, and, in short, there was a manifestation of oriental ferocity, now unhappily more easy to be comprehended by English readers than it would have been a few years ago. Maria drew closer to Mr. Arundel, as Boosey advanced further into the room, and nearer to her superiors than a British servant would have deemed it her place to stand, and Maria regarded her movement as that of a cat approaching for a bound.

"Stand *there*, woman," said Keckling, indicating a spot nearer the door, and speaking as men do who have learned a master's authority on the banks of the Neva. Boosey, though not accustomed to be so addressed of late, instantly obeyed.

"Is that," asked Mr. Keckling, "the lady whom Mr. Alban Cheriton showed you?"

"Yes," said the Ayah, gloomily.

"Who was with her when you saw her?"

"She knows."

"I ask *you*, woman? do you hear?" said Keckling, irate.

The Ayah was silent.

"Answer," said John Claxton; "you know me, and that I am the friend of Mr. Philip Arundel."

"I know you," said Boosey.

"Who the devil cares," exclaimed Mr. Keckling, "who you know or who you don't know, woman? You are ordered to answer a question, and if you don't answer it I will send you off to prison under the care of that policeman by the gas-lamp."

In one second Boosey had darted from the room. She was not in the least awed of the threat, or of Keckling's violent words, but a thought had struck her, and she was resolved to ascertain, before speaking, whether opening her mouth might do some injury to Miss Maggie. She vanished like a figure from a morning dream, and hurried up to her young mistress.

"Will my answering the question do as well," said Maria, "or am I not to be believed?"

"Much better," said Keckling; "but I will make an example of that black-skinned brute. How dare she go without replying. Who was with you, my dear," he added hastily, correcting himself into "my dear Mrs. Prescott," and then feeling that he had made a blunder, but the others had no leisure to note it. "Who was with you?"

"Somebody very well known to you, sir, she says," replied Maria.

"To me?"

"Yes, sir. It may be very strange that acquaintances of yours should know me, but it is true, nevertheless. This is a very humble acquaintance, however, and her name is Zuleika Harris."

"A miserable little street dancing girl."

"I don't know about miserable, as I have been asked to make her comfortable; and so I have, as far as I could, though she's hard metal to hammer on. But she's dying, poor little soul."

Mr. Keckling did not seem to care whether the child spoken of were dying or not, but went on eagerly—

"Did the man we have been speaking of as having done so much mischief place her with you?"

"Yes, certainly; but there was no mischief in that, was there, sir?" said Maria, really uncertain whether she had been unconsciously doing more wrong. "She was ill, and had been ill-treated, and I was to see her looked after. I took the affair to be a bit of human kindness."

"Listen," said Keckling, "and see what sort of kindness you have helped to do to one who never willingly injured you, or any one else, in her life. Alban Cheriton has contrived to make Mrs. Arundel believe that the child, Zuleika, is the child of Philip Arundel and yourself, and the Ayah was brought to see you and her together, and to tell her mistress of your happy home, to which she believes, of course, that Philip comes to complete the happy group."

Maria had resumed her seat, but now sprang to her feet.

"O!" she exclaimed, with a wild shuddering cry, "I have no child! My baby, my darling, is a little angel in heaven; and perhaps God in his mercy will some day remember how very, very young that baby's poor mother was when he died, and what bitter tears she wept upon his poor little coffin—I don't know—I am a wretched thing, but they do say there is love for us all—and I am sure I loved that child enough to be remembered for his sake, if there is anything after we are gone. I beg your pardon, all of you, for talking wild," she added, trying to wipe away the tears that came down plentifully, and streamed through the thin fingers she pressed to her eyes. "What you want to know is whether Philip Arundel was that child's father. No. And I have never had another. And I have never heard the sound of Philip Arundel's voice since—since—did any of you hear mine when I hid myself in a pew in the church gallery, and cried my heart out on the floor, while he was saying the service to his bride! Never since, as I hope to see my baby in heaven!"

The last words seemed to choke her utterance, and she stared wildly round, stretched out her hands imploringly for support, and before one of their eagerly extended hands could reach her, she fell down upon the ground before them.

But it was not her words that had choked her utterance.

"You sent for me?" said Margaret Arundel, who at that instant entered the apartment, and addressed Mr. Keckling.

"Sent for you, my love?" said Mr. Keckling, in great perturbation. "No, no. That lying Ayah; I will murder her. Pray go away, go away instantly. This is no place for you."

But Margaret's eye caught sight of the fallen form of Maria, whom Mr. Arundel and Claxton were gradually raising, with a caution that was but too necessary, for the fatal sign was crimson on her lip and hand, and on the bosom of her dress.

"Yes, you did quite right to send for me, if I can be useful," said Mrs. Arundel, "and please let me come to her. I am not foolish about—about that—I have seen something at St. Oscars. Pray let me——"

This was said as Mr. Keckling was interposing to prevent Margaret from approaching the fallen girl.

"It is not that," said Keckling, "but you *must* go, my dear,——"

Boosey had followed her mistress, and drew stealthily to her ear.





*Atonements.*



"It is her. It is his child's mother. But she is down—she is down!" repeated Boosey, in savage triumph.

Down? ay, and so was the great devil himself—down, trampled, spurned, for having dared for one single second of time, and as those words hissed into the ear of the Christian woman, to strive for a place in her heart. Her wrongs, her sorrows, up to the very last and bitterest of which she had just heard—he flashed them all before her in one lurid moment, and then—and then, down into the dust with you, wretched old helpless serpent, under the foot of the Woman, ever to be thy enemy and conqueror in this world, until the Infinite, in vengeance or pardon, deals with thine eternity.

Down, too, was Margaret Arundel, with a knee on the ground, and an arm tenderly supporting the form of her husband's mistress.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE TEMPLE AGAIN.

AT the moment that poor Maria was falling, if not exactly in Philip Arundel's cause, at least from excitement occasioned in endeavouring to serve him, he was in the Chambers, carefully knocking out the ashes from his meerschaum, and was busily replenishing it for a fresh smoke, as Margaret was on her knees by the side of Maria. This is, of course, not making any charge against him—he could know nothing of what was being done and suffered for his sake—but is simply mentioned as one of the coincidences of life. Many such things occur daily, and we make them matters of foolish self-reproach. "That I should have been dealing cards while my child was dying," a grieving father has said ere now. "That I was laughing at Mr. Robson while my boy was lying, with a broken leg, in the mud of the Peiho!" a mother may have exclaimed. Yet is not this flat rebellion against the merciful provision of nature, that we shall not, and cannot, be in two places at once? We have no right to be angry with ourselves for our limited powers.

But it is a legitimate matter of complaint against Philip that when, an hour or so later, he heard John Claxton's latch-key, he prepared to assail Claxton with reproach for having gone out without telling him where, or rather, whether and when he would be back to dinner. A querulous tone had grown upon him, as it will upon people who have nothing to do except to do right, and who do not even do that.

But Claxton's unusually grave manner was instantly noted by Philip, and the pipe was thrown aside.

"Something wrong?" asked Philip, earnestly, and laying his hand on his friend's arm.

"Sit down," said Claxton. "Clarke!"

"He's gone," said Philip. "It got late, so I told him you——"

"So much the better," said Claxton, closing the black door, and

the next, and the door of the room in which they were, preparations which had their effect upon Philip.

"You've seen somebody," said Philip.

"Have I *not*?" returned his friend.

"Tell us all; quick!"

"Philip," said John Claxton, "I do not say that there is time to lose, but there is time to think, which is never time lost. You are perhaps at the most important moment of your life."

"But tell me at once—we can think afterwards," said Philip, impatiently.

"You must, please, let me have my own way. If I had bad news for you, I would, of course, give it you at once, without mystification, and trust to your being a man with it. But that is not so."

"If it's not bad, it's good. Out with it, John; though, to tell the truth, if it is not bad, I hardly see how there can be anything I should be much interested in."

"I thought so too, until a very little while ago."

"Take your own way. I know you will, so it's needless my saying that." And he resumed his pipe.

"Ah, you'll not smoke that out," said Claxton.

"What makes you say that?"

"See if you do. But to begin. I have not called in the Square a good while, so I thought I would go there to-day."

"Good heaven! all's well there? You said there was nothing wrong," said Philip, anxiously.

"Do you think I would speak as I do if there was?"

"Well, as the dear old governor and the girls are all right, I think I do see my way to the end of this baccy."

"There are other persons in the world besides your father and sisters, Philip."

"I suppose there are. But do not look so grim, if you have nothing disagreeable to say. I never, in all our acquaintance, saw you so solemn, old boy."

"Perhaps I never felt so strongly upon any subject as I feel just now."

"If you say that, Jack, I know I ought to be grave."

"Hear what I have to say. I called upon Mr. Arundel, and found him at home, but your sisters were out."

"Bore for you."

"On the contrary, I went to see him. He went with me to Mr. Keckling's, who was also at home. The party increased by the addition of three other persons, who came separately, but we were all six together an hour ago. The three were, Mrs. Philip Arundel, the Ayah Boosey, who was here, and Maria."

"Are you out of your senses?" cried Philip, starting up. "A vulgar sell is a thing I never heard you try in your life, and I am sure you would not begin on me; but, old fellow——"

"Sit down," said Claxton, preemptorily. "If you think I am in any joking mood now, you will find to the contrary. The party was as I tell you."

"But, good God! what do you mean? Maria speaking to my father—but even that might be nothing; but speaking to my wife!"

"No, she did not speak to your wife."

"That's something ; but, by Jove, the impudence that could take her into their presence. I did not think it was in her. I thought she had some good instincts, and had learned rather a better tone of feeling from knowing me, than to go and do such an infernal thing. But they are all alike—pay them and pet them, and they are all pleasant, but turn your back, and they stab at you."

And injured virtue and innocence looked the picture of indignation.

"You will be more sorry for these words than for anything you ever said in your life," replied John Claxton, calmly.

"Shall I?" asked the other. "Well, we shall see. But I am heartily glad you prevented her from speaking to Margaret."

"We did not prevent her."

"What, she *had* the good taste to be silent in Mrs. Arundel's presence?"

"Mrs. Arundel forbade Maria to speak to her."

"That was right, and showed proper dignity ; but you ought surely not to have left it necessary for my wife to say anything to her."

"It was not ; but she would say what she had to say."

"And what was it—how did she put it?" said Philip, eagerly. "I have known her show dignity enough, but this was a trying occasion. What were her words, do you remember?"

"Perfectly. They were these : 'There, there, do not try to talk to me, poor thing, but let us carry you quietly to bed, and then, if the doctor will give you leave, you shall say all that you wish. But, if it will make you more comfortable, I know all you could tell me—all. Now, will you let us carry you upstairs?'"

"Am I in a dream, John Claxton, and is this all nightmare? I wish I could wake. What was Maria doing while Mrs. Arundel was saying this?"

"Lying on the carpet, but half raised up, because Mrs. Arundel had Maria's head against her own knee, and had an arm round her, while she pressed a handkerchief to Maria's lips with her disengaged hand."

"And what had happened?" demanded Philip, now growing greatly excited.

"Maria had broken a blood-vessel, and fallen to the ground, just before Mrs. Arundel entered."

"Poor girl—poor girl—I must—but, Claxton—then Margaret did not know who she was?"

"She knew all—do I not tell you that she said so? She knew the truth, and more than the truth, for a very cruel lie had been invented to add to her troubles, and yet, as I say, she acted nobly."

"Well, it *was* noble. Knowing all that I know, I repeat, it was noble. If I never see her again in this world, I will say so."

"Why the condition?" asked Claxton, calmly. "If you do see her again in this world, and see her daily and hourly for the rest of your life, you ought never to forget what I have told you."

"I never shall, Jack. But now that you have let me cross-examine the story out of you, I don't know why, tell me everything, that I may know how to act."

"There is no occasion for you to act in any way."

"Surely that is for me to decide."

"You will think with me, when I have told you all. In the first place, Maria (do you care to know that her name is now Mrs. Prescott?) is safely laid away in a most comfortable bedroom at Mr. Keckling's, and a first-rate doctor had paid his visit before I left."

"And what does he say about her, poor thing?" said Philip. "I cannot help feeling for her, badly as she has behaved. She was very gentle and good in old times—what does he say?"

"That she will die."

"Poor Maria—poor Maria!" And Philip leaned against the mantel-piece, and thought a good deal about "old times," and his eyes were wet when he turned to his friend, and he did not attempt to hide the fact that they were so.

"I should have been very sorry not to see that, Philip," said Claxton. "But you must hear some more. Let me say that your father and your wife are completely reconciled, if you can apply the word in a case where there has never been any quarrel, and Mrs. Arundel, I believe, stands higher in his estimation than ever. But that she has taken her place as nurse by the bedside of Maria Prescott, she would have gone to Thanington Square."

"I am in no mood to be proud, John. But my father had no right to take any side in the affair, and certainly not to ask Margaret to his house, until I gave my consent."

"If you think so when we have done talking, you can write and say so, and as Mrs. Arundel has not gone to the Square, there is no particular wrong done to you."

"Go on," said Philip, sadly, "you cannot think how I am cut up about that poor girl. Of course she had her allowance regularly enough, and of course she was nothing more to me, but——" And the tears were again in his eyes.

"But you cannot forget that she is the mother of your child."

"What damned talk are you at now?" said Philip, angrily.

"Nay, the child—the little girl that you were so fond of, that you were always going to see, when of course you saw her mother. The daughter whose winning ways had laid so great a hold upon your heart that you utterly neglected the beautiful and engaging son born to you in wedlock, and nearly broke your wife's heart by your indifference to her and it."

"You know the whole is a lie."

"Yes, but Mrs. Philip Arundel did not know it to be so, but believed it all, when she threw herself by the side of Maria to try and help her. It would have been strange if she had not believed it, when an eye-witness was sent to assure her of the fact."

"Sent—sent—by whom? By Maria?"

"No, Philip. Maria's death, which is certain, will be mainly due to her having preserved, amid all her folly and vice, a truer love for you than you have ever had for her, seeing that you hasten, at the first hint, to accuse her of a cruel treachery. She dared to make her way into a respectable house, and to confront cold and respectable people, in order to declare the truth about you, and after submitting to a harsh ques-

tioning, and to a series of insults, of which I am now ashamed to think I was a witness, she broke out into some passionate words which were too much for her—and there she lay.”

“But who—who in the name of all the devils, was the traitor?”

“The same person who took the letter, one of yours to Maria, and placed it in your wife’s desk that she might be sure to find it.”

“Who is it?” said Philip with a fierce oath.

“The same person who lied to you on the subject of your wife’s knowledge of the guilt of her family, and persuaded you that Mrs. Arundel, before her marriage, knew of shame which she concealed from you, when she was as innocent of that knowledge as her own baby.”

Philip’s excitement may be imagined, but though white with rage, he restrained himself within bounds.

“You want evidence that what was told you was false. For that you may, if you can, ask your wife while you look into her face. But you want evidence that we know you were told that lie. This you may ask, if poor Maria can speak, from her, for she was in the next room, and heard every word. As she is dying for telling the truth for you, I suppose you will believe her?”

“By Heaven!” said Philip in a low, hollow voice, “I am so bewildered, that while you tell me of what I know I have heard, and of a place, and of a secret, I cannot recall the circumstances. I shall know it presently—don’t tell me, old fellow, please, or I shall have less confidence in my own memory—surely that is not going?”

“When you find the room,” said Claxton, “get upon a chair, and from the fifth shelf take an old copy of Prynne’s *Histriomastrix*. Open it, and you will find, Maria says, that very letter, placed there by herself, it having been returned to you by your wife, and you having brought it to a friend, on whose table——”

“That was Alban Cheriton!” exclaimed Philip.

“You have named your friend. And now you know all, except that he has all along been in love with your wife, and that love has driven him frantic, and hence the series of revenges.”

“Alban Cheriton!” repeated Philip.

“He wound up the series—nay, you are not listening, but hear this—by visiting Mrs. Arundel, and frightening the poor dear soul almost out of her senses by proposing to destroy her child and to elope with him to the Continent. He is mad, of course.”

Philip had scarcely heard, or at least understood the last words.

“My head is very much bewildered,” he said. “I shall be all right presently. I will go and sit in the bedroom. Let me alone, old fellow, please, I want to think.”

“And that is exactly what I told you that you would have to do, and had time to do, my dear Philip. But don’t go away. Never mind me, while I write some letters, but if you want to ask me any more questions, here I shall be.”

“If I do, I will come out to you,” said Philip, and he went into the other room, and locked the door, but quietly, that Claxton might not think himself excluded. We will not follow him.

“A noble woman,” said John Claxton to himself. “Much too good for him, fine fellow as he is, but that’s beside the question.”

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## AN UNDERCURRENT.

"MR. EARNSHAW," said Harris, "you have the makings of a great man in you, but, like many other gifted persons, you are victim to the besetting sin of the pride of birth. That failing singularly interferes with your fortune. If you could only forget that your father was a beadle."

"Mr. Harris," returned Earnshaw, "don't you think you'd better keep your chaff for them that likes it? If we are to do business, we had best make it pleasant."

"And that, Earnshaw, if you will allow me to drop the courtesy title, is exactly what I desire. Only as at present you seem inclined to take all the advantages of business into your own keeping, and leave me nothing but the work to do, I confess that I am not exactly enthusiastic on the subject."

"I don't see what you mean, Harris."

"I will not accuse you of wilful blindness, Mr. Earnshaw, but will speak as if I did not know that you perfectly understand me. You have got a notion, which I dare say is a very just one, that a gentleman——"

"Don't name names here—don't," said Earnshaw.

"Here," was a place which neither diplomatists, nor politicians, nor strike-agitators might have selected to discuss a plan or a plot, but which Mr. Keckling's men, Harris and Earnshaw, found quite private enough for their purposes. It was in the neighbourhood of a market, near which the earl, who gave it name, "erected a palace, and lived there in a princely manner," and in which market, later, the gilt tub of Orator Henley glittered, and the charities of Mrs. Bracegirdle were dispensed, the kind-hearted actress being "followed by the acclamations of the inhabitants." Now, of course, nobody but graphic authors and the metropolitan police know where Clare Market is situate. In one of its lanes Mr. Harris and Mr. Earnshaw had no difficulty in finding what others might not have lighted on so readily, namely, the entrance to something which, having a stage, and seats, and spectators, and performers, is entitled to be called a theatre. It would not have occurred to you, passing a squalid-looking public house, very scantily illuminated, and in miserable contrast with the flare, and plate-glass, and gigantic vats of the Gin-Vatican opposite, that by going past a singularly dirty bar, and paying a very small deposit, you would make your way into a temple of the drama; but she finds humbler homes even than this, and you would have encountered not by any means the chance, but the certainty, of having your head liberally punched by some *habitué*, did you call this fane by the name given to the temporary erections where the rising generation study histrionics. It was a real theatre, low, small, and rickety, and flavoured with various "liquid odours," as Milton says, besides the dominant scent of the strongest tobacco. Good stout benches, with



backs, and with flaps to hold the metallic or ceramic vase, (glass was little affected,) held a coarse, but not particularly vicious looking audience. The unskilled mechanic came here, while his superior, the skilled workman, frequented the music hall, and there was a sprinkling from that inexplicable class of the population who never seem to have anything to do, or at all events never to do it, but in the day time may be seen gaping in scores round a horse that is down, or a large pane of glass that is broken, or a street that is being repaved, or a chimney that is on fire, or something else which is no business of theirs, in respect of which they can be of no use, and while staring at which they block up the pathway, and often get a half-angry curse from busy men, who hate to see lounging idlers—of the lower class. Some of them were in the theatre we speak of, but they did not appear to take much interest in what was going on, but gazed moonily on their pewter pots, or at their highlows, or at anything but that which it might be supposed they came there to see. Some sailors, by no means noisy, for they had got past that stage of tipsy enjoyment, were sticking stolidly to their pipes, but minding the stage very hard indeed, and occasionally howling out encouragement to the performers, and staggering down to the footlights to reward the artists with beer, until repulsed by the functionary who acted as beer-man, and box-keeper, and general superintendent of the auditory.

The character of the performances may easily be imagined. The baldest talk, delivered in the worst manner by the most ill-dressed scarecrows going, was relieved by an occasional murder, all far inferior to what may be seen at such fairs as the march of intellect is permitting to exist. But the drama was hastily got through, just as an old opera used to be hurried over, when a ballet with a new Cerito or Carlotta Grisi was to be given—alas, I speak of the past. The staple attractions here were evidently the comic song, and the dance, and specimens of this kind of thing, generally very bad, were alternated for an hour or two. The British public is not particular in the quality of its amusement, if you make the said public comfortable while it is being amused, but to give it a bad thing, and a bad seat to see it from, is a direct invitation to it to be abusive. Now here the spectators were, in their way, at tolerable ease, and so were not intolerant.

"Don't name names here," was Earnshaw's caution to his companion, but there did not seem any particular danger of their conversation being overheard by anybody who could turn his ears to account. The two men sat at the back row of the theatre, against the wall, and there was an unfilled gap between them and the group of spectators. Harris was smoking and drinking, like a man who was taking his pleasure, but Earnshaw, though in compliance with the custom of the place he had ordered some beer, scarcely partook of it. He was an uncomfortable kind of man, who cannot say a thing and have done with it, but whispers, and fidgets, and recurs to the topic when you have settled it, and never seems able to clear his mind and turn to his amusement. A very objectionable form of man, and one to be black-balled at any club where one has power to do him that social damage.

"Very good, sir," said Harris, "I am schooled. That fellow would not do the clog-dance so badly if he had any notion of time. I can do it better than that, and have done it better, in the presence of distinguished patrons of the legitimate drama."

Mr. Earnshaw said a very rude thing about clog-dancers and dramas, and said that they had come there for business.

"Business and pleasure both, my dear sir. I will take the pleasure, and you shall attend to the business."

"You have never given a thought to what I said," grumbled Earnshaw.

"I fancied that, on the contrary, I had shown you that I had thought all through it, and given you my mind upon it. Shall I be coarsely and vulgarly plain with you, my dear Mr. Earnshaw?—I'm not to be done."

"Who wants to do you?"

"A gentleman, named Earnshaw, descended from beadles."

"I don't see how I can offer fairer. You'll get nothing without me."

"Possibly, but without me you will be in the same position. Let us be open-hearted and candid, Earnshaw, as becomes affectionate friends and boon companions. You hate me like the devil, or possibly a good deal worse, and you have a right to do so, because you have injured me; and I, knowing human nature, blame you not. But I don't exactly dote upon you, my dear Earnshaw, and at all events the blindness of my affection does not go to the extent of giving you a chance of cheating me again, you old rascal. Mind that. And now let us swear an eternal friendship."

"I never wronged you, Harris."

"Don't tell lies, Earnshaw; because I don't like that trait in my bosom friend. You have done me many wrongs, and among them was your stealing the letter I wrote to the governor, and so preventing his helping me. You can deny it if you like, and swear to your denial. Pray do if you think it would make you more comfortable, but I shan't believe a word of it. You had better stop from lies, my dear friend, and mend your bid."

"How can I tell what we may make of it?"

"I don't want you to tell. But I want to be sure that, whatever it may be, this child gets half."

"One of us must trust the other, Harris."

"I think so. Therefore, do you trust me, because I'm not inclined to arrange the trust the other way. Look at that girl—her cheek is raddled like a sheep's back, but she would have a good voice if she had not spoiled it by wetting her throat too much."

"You could do nothing with the governor."

"You are afraid to let me try."

"And time presses. That man A. S. must have good spies."

"A. S.—Armandale Spencer. Bother, who's to hear? Why do you say he must?"

"Because the reconciliation between a certain lady and her husband's father had not taken place twelve hours before he knew of it."

"What's the good of humbugging me? You were his spy, and told him."

"I swear I did not."

"Quite right to say so; but it was so clearly part of your game. You say that he has been quite quiet all the time that Mrs. A. was separate from the Square people."

"What could he do? His best card was out of his hand while she was away. Now he picks it up again, and wants to follow suit with himself."

"Why, Earnshaw, you are quite allegoric. Did your father teach you imagination from the hatchments?"

"Don't be a fool, will you? Don't you see that now she is in favour again, and I suppose will make it up with her husband, now comes the old rascal's turn?"

"Who do you mean?—your own?"

"A. S.'s, in course," persevered Earnshaw, in a low whisper. Harris tried to keep him off by huge puffs of tobacco smoke, but there was no getting him to sit up and speak out.

"I know the governor would do the thing handsome," continued Earnshaw, "if we could make A. S. safe at this particular moment. I have reason to know that he would like him got out of the way before the attempt to bring husband and wife together is made, so that there may be all the less unpleasantness."

"Reason to know means keyholes."

"Never mind what it means. It is the fact."

"Getting a gentleman out of the way is not the easiest thing in the world, unless it is to be done in the old-fashioned way. Do you want us to invite Mr. Armandale down the dark arches, and give him a topper for luck? Because, though it would be a very right thing to do to the old scoundrel, I have a preference for somebody else doing it. I am not clear that I have a vocation to go about punishing evil-doers."

"I don't mind telling you that I have saved money."

"And are therefore no longer one of the dangerous classes. I am answered, and any way he is not to be finished off. It is a pity, too."

"He knows me, or I could do it all myself."

"But he don't know me."

"If he has such spies, as it seems he has, he knows everybody that comes to K."

"You know my belief about his spy, but if you stand by that lie you must, in logic, my dearest friend, follow it out and consider that he knows me."

"We must let in somebody else, and I have my eye upon the man."

"What, that fat sailor? There's no press-gang now, my dear Mr. Earnshaw. It would be a good thing if there were one, provided it were under proper direction, and did not take anybody that could show he lived honestly. But as that is not the present arrangement —"

"Listen to me," said Earnshaw, sipping his beer. "The party I mean is a lawyer."

"Sounds bad."

"But aint. He's one who will act on the square, and will take nothing but his regular bill. There are reasons why he wont."

"Who's this angelic bloater?"

"He's a cousin of Mrs. A."

"I thought that was her cousin, that stern kind of chap, a doctor, that took charge of Zuleika."

"This is his brother, who is in law. There are things which I can't tell you, and which don't matter to the business, why he would move heaven and earth to do a good turn to the A.'s, who have a devil of a grievance against the man you saw. And he is a very sharp and determined young chap, and he'll do the thing right well. And as I say, he'll do it for his costs, so whatever the governor thinks the job worth is somebody's and somebody's."

"But the bargain must be made beforehand, Earnshaw of my soul."

"You don't know the governor. Very likely he'd make the bargain, and fix a price, and a good one. When the work was done he would pay the price, and take a receipt in full, and then say that if we had left it to his discretion, he should have given us three times as much."

"Easy to say."

"But it would be true. He's an arbitrary cove, but not a bad sort."

"My dear Earnshaw, we come back to our original point. I will gladly help you in the matter, but you shall not cheat me. You will if you can. The only way that I see to save you from doing your friend a wrong is for us both to see Mr. Keckling together, and tell him that we have a plan in hand; that if it fails, he hears no more about it; but if it succeeds, and he thinks it worth reward, the reward is to be equally divided between two gentlemen who have the honour to be his obedient humble servants."

"That would blow all. He would decline to have anything to do with it. He's not a person to be served in that way. He would either know all about it, or repudiate it, and kick us out of the house. He's not been in Russia for nothing."

"I see your game, my beloved friend, but it is no go. Either in your wisdom devise some plan for preventing yourself from cheating me, or your plan and yourself, my dearest Earnshaw, may go to the devil together."

"Would you fix some price for yourself, and then we could see if it could not be secured to you? Then leave me to get it from K. if I could."

"With four times as much more. If he pays in this matter at all, he'll pay like a prince. But come, I won't be impracticable. How many fingers, counting thumb, are there on this hand?"

"Four more than need be counted in the matter, if you mean business," said Earnshaw, sulkily.

"Then I will have another pint of ale, and enjoy the performance. Bravo, my girl, very good—very well danced, indeed; and I daresay it will not be laid to your charge in another world that you were handy in this. Bravo!"

"You don't want to be in it?" asked Earnshaw.

"I don't want to put my foot in it," returned Harris. "When your anatomical studies have led you to the conclusion that I have five fingers, come to me and tell me so."

"Suppose it was so, which it can't by any chance be, what sort of proof would you want from me?"

"A small one, on thin crisp paper, issued in Threadneedle Street."

"Rubbish—don't talk rubbish."

"That is my fancy document, Mr. Earnshaw, and that is my figure, and you will have to deposit that document (don't forget to make up your face for a lie and say you haven't the money, because you told me that you had made a lot, which means a deal more, with you, than five hundred pounds), and it shall be placed where I can get it the day our friend A. S. comes to grief. Now I hate to be bothered with business when I am amusing myself, and I swear I won't say another word about it, and what's more, I won't abate a farthing. You want me very much, or you would not throw in the way of a man you hate the chance of making a shilling. So make up your mind whenever you like, and ask yourself whether you shall agree, and if echo answers in the affirmative, come to your devoted friend Harris. If it don't, go to blazes."

"Well, come out, and let's talk somewhere else," said Earnshaw.

"I shan't. I am in attendance upon a young lady, and when she has done, I propose to myself the honour of seeing her home to supper."

"Where can I see you afterwards?"

"Nowhere, until to-morrow."

Earnshaw looked perfectly wretched at being thus interdicted from re-opening and re-discussing the whole subject, but Harris was inexorable, and puffed smoke at him, answered his remarks with observations on the songs and company, and utterly refused to hear more. Earnshaw was trying to interject one more appeal, when Harris slapped him on the back—

"There she is—applaud, you sir, will you? Give her a reception."

And Zuleika bounced upon the stage.

She was dressed in what is supposed, in such places, to be the costume of a Highlander, and it need hardly be said that a mass of heterogeneous colours which no Highlander ever wore at one time, was surmounted by an ostrich feather such as no Highlander had ever worn at all, some vile paint on her cheeks, and her legs encased in wrinkled and dingy fleshings. So once more presents herself, the incorrigible Zuleika. She had got at length a comfortable home at Maria Prescott's, and it might be thought that she would have gladly remained there, but the vagabond element was too strong in the little Bohemian, and sooner than live in quiet and decency, she availed herself of Maria's disaster to take an informal leave of the premises (not perhaps taking more of her friend's property than many a greedy and respectable woman would take under similar circumstances, if quite sure not to be found out), and she had resumed her former avocations, and become once more a star of the smallest magnitude consistent with stardom.

Zuleika gave the Highland fling with much dash, and was loudly applauded and encored.

"If you're only going with her," said Earnshaw, "I can come with you."

"What do you mean by only her? You never saw that fling better done in your life, I know. And I am going to take her home, and I don't mean that either she or I shall be annoyed with business. If you haven't made up your mind, see me to-morrow."

"There's no time to lose," persisted Earnshaw.

"Who's losing time, you or I, you old bloke? If you choose to say yes, and ten to-morrow, the business is done."

"Well, will you meet me in Finsbury Circus to-morrow?" said Earnshaw.

"No, unless it is to the business. Finsbury Circus is a pleasant locality, with an extremely handsome building in the centre; but I am not so fond of architecture as to be dragged all that way unless I am certain that something is to come of it. And now good night, old hoss, I am going round to fetch my young lady. She doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Poor Zuleika. It was not very good guardianship to which she had again resigned herself. We have heard Harris's history, and of his profligate conduct, and of what led to the child's becoming a vagrant. But he had always retained a sense that he had wronged her, and occasionally made, in his way, an effort to raise her out of the dirt, and though such effort was not much appreciated by Zuleika, the man persisted in preserving, amid all his vagrancies and shifts, an idea of responsibility as regarded her. It was the only bit of salt in his nature, but it kept the rest from being so utterly bad as it might have been. He resolved that if Earnshaw came to his terms, he would place the girl in some sort of respectable keeping, and he wondered whether there were boarding-schools from which no young lady could possibly escape.

Whether Earnshaw screwed himself up to assent to the terms that night, or preferred to dawdle over the arrangement a little longer, is not within my knowledge.

But it is certain that on the following afternoon Earnshaw had an interview with Latimer Cheriton, at the young lawyer's office in the city. What passed between Miss Lizzie Pybus's late lover and present husband and Mr. Earnshaw may be gathered from what will appear hereafter; but here it need only be said that Latimer entered in the most energetic manner into the plan, and proceeded to take the necessary steps for carrying it out. And although he was much too astute a young solicitor to confide a professional secret to his wife or any body else upon sentimental grounds, it may easily be imagined that on returning to the pleasant first-floor lodgings in which the young couple had the good sense to resolve to live while Latimer's practice was small (and in which there were seldom fewer than five or six of Lizzie's sisters, whom Latimer Cheriton, at this period of his life, did not consider it a bore to have perpetually in his house), he intimated to Mrs. Latimer that he was likely to have an opportunity of obliging some valued friends of Mrs. Arundel. In exchange for which piece of information Lizzie gave him a kiss, and told him to oblige anybody who could be useful to them, to which he replied by rebuking her for



*The Little 'Star'.*

London: Richard Bentley, 1858.





being so mercenary, to which she rejoined by holding up to him, from behind a curtain, so that the girls could not see it, something small and white—a baby's cap for aught I know—but I am ashamed of wasting paper on such nonsense.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE CONCEALED CARD.

ARMANDALE SPENCER *was* well served by his spy, and had early intelligence of the incidents that occurred at Mr. Keckling's. But for once Mr. Earnshaw was wronged in being charged with having sent Spencer the intelligence, although the former would have done so without the least hesitation, had it appeared to him part of his game to do so. Indeed, when Harris made the suggestion, Earnshaw rather reproached himself that he could say, without falsehood, that the idea had escaped him. Armandale Spencer had bribed another servant of Keckling's, a man who had been under great obligations to his master, both for forgiveness and for liberality, and whose fidelity might therefore have been expected by those who hold the unscriptural doctrine that you are to believe men will behave well to you if you behave well to them, and who thereby reduce duty to a mere matter of reciprocity. A few well planted pieces of gold gave Armandale the most accurate knowledge of all that went on in Keckling's house, and increased the merit of the old man's kindness to his servant by rendering it of not the least advantage to himself. Perhaps the Reverend Mr. Parnell's Strange Partner walks about even now, with his gradual plumes under a great coat, and redresses the balances of private life.

Spencer had been baffled, though not discouraged, by the separation of his daughter from her husband, and the check thereby afforded to the prosecution of his plans for resuming a gentleman's place in society. He had full leisure for meditation upon his next campaign before the event occurred which gave him the signal to put his forces in marching order. Perhaps he thought that he had played the bold game rather too boldly, and had overcalculated the timidity of those he had to deal with. Knowing what an exceedingly bad man he was, and how very objectionable it must be to decent persons to associate with him, he had feared to make his approaches in any way that would give them a chance of temporizing. He made a sort of tiger spring, and, as has been seen, he did not exactly secure his prey. But he regarded his having joined himself to Margaret, and in a manner given his fatherly sanction to her flight, and his fatherly protection to her sojourn at Hastings, as a masterpiece of management, and if it had not been for the horrible rudeness of Mr. Keckling in the Hastings interview, and the brutality with which the old Russian tore the veil from the past life of the old Indian, Spencer

would have begun to hope that he might pursue a gentler policy, and be gradually admitted into society. Indeed, had not Keckling shown his hand, and convinced Armandale that his Oriental history was really known, not merely guessed at, he would have had still stronger hopes of success; for everybody knows that India is a long way off, that it is a country where the English people scandalize one another a good deal, and like to believe the worst of one another, and that at home, before ostracising a man, we allow him a good while to prove that he really deserves what has been said of him in the East. But when Armandale Spencer recurred to the specific charges made by Keckling, who spoke as from authority, and not as the scribes of scandalous rumours, Margaret's father could not but deem his game a bad one.

Still, the game was not lost, Margaret's separation from her husband had been in some sort balanced by her re-union with her father, and now that separation might possibly, Spencer thought, be done away. For he scarcely conceived it possible that a wife would take her husband's mistress to her arms, and yet refuse to be reconciled to the husband himself. So, informed of the scene by Mr. Keckling's grateful footman, who begged an hour to go away and see a sick mother, and to whom his master immediately ordered a bottle of wine to be given for the benefit of that afflicted nonentity, Armandale once more prepared for the encounter. And, like a wise general, he determined to have his whole force ready for action.

There was one reserve force at which he had more than hinted in his stormy interview with Keckling. He would have preferred not to use it, but still was prepared to do so, if compelled by failure without it.

Spencer retained his lodgings in Half-Moon Street, holding that it is a good thing to have a respectable address, and to change it as little as possible. But it would not have exactly suited him to introduce into those lodgings the person whom I reluctantly bring upon our scene, but shall willingly dismiss when her brief part is over.

In the third floor of a poor lodging-house in a street leading from the Hampstead-road, Armandale Spencer had, on his arrival in England, hastened to place one who had once been the lovely Miss Featherleigh, the belle of Calcutta society. Small resemblance bore the wreck thus consigned to the charge of a mercenary termagant to the young beauty whose ivory forehead, liquid blue eyes, rosy lips, and golden hair had attracted the sensuous Armandale Spencer, and whom, when satiety had succeeded to an ignoble love, her husband had made his victim in even worse fashion. The lithe and graceful figure and the languishing manner were alike gone, and in the degraded looking being, who cared little what was said or done to her, provided she were permitted to crouch on her mattress and smoke her opium, it would have been impossible for even the eye of love (and no eye of true love had ever rested on that inane loveliness) to recognise her who had secured the hand of one of the cleverest officers in the military service, and then, for a time at least, the regard of one of the ablest of civilians, in the days of her girlhood. But there, carefully im-

prisoned by her husband's orders, for he could not afford to lose trace of her, lay in a corner of the meagerly furnished and miserably dull apartment, the once charming Laura Spencer.

Armandale had a latch-key to the house in Peterby-street—he chose to have latch-keys wherever it was possible, hating to be kept at doors and looked at either by passers-by or servants—and he suddenly presented himself in his wife's apartment. As he approached the room a voice, clearly not hers, said—

"I wont have my mattresses dragged upon the floor, then, and so I tell you, m'm. People who haven't got a stick of their own are always ready to make free with the goods of other folks, I wont have it, so get off of it before I pull you off."

"O, let me be, my good woman. I shall not hurt your mattress," pleaded Mrs. Armandale Spencer, almost whiningly. "It's the only way I can be comfortable. Mr. Spencer will pay any damage."

"I don't know that; and whether he will or not, I don't choose to have my things illused. Get off at once."

There seemed something like a struggle, and then came a plaintive cry, half suppressed, from the lady.

Armandale entered, and found the landlady grasping Mrs. Spencer's arm, and dragging her from the mattress, which the poor woman had pulled to a corner of the room, and throwing a shawl or two upon it had made into the humblest resemblance of the luxurious lowliness of the East.

Laura first saw him enter, and looked up appealingly. For his own reasons he chose to take her part, a thing not very usual with him.

"Make her leave me alone. I'm doing no harm," she whined.

Armandale struck at the landlady's arm rather sharply with his cane, and as she released Mrs. Spencer and turned round furiously to take her own part, he assailed her with such an awful storm of abuse and blasphemy, got up at the very shortest notice, and without the least anger, that the woman, virago as she was, after two or three attempts to break in, fairly quailed under the shower of corrosive epithet, and burst into tears. Armandale then shoved her out of the room, discharging a parting salute of extraordinary virulence, and banging the door after her in a way that shook the house.

"The *oanaille* never believe that you are in earnest unless you speak rather plainly," he said in a gentle voice. "Ladies know better, and obey you at once, don't they, Laura dear?"

The woman looked up, in her helpless, stupefied manner; but it was clear that Armandale had known how to make himself obeyed by her.

"I did not know you were coming to-day," she said. "Shall they get you anything?" And repugnant as all exertion evidently was to her, she scrambled up to get him the best chair in the room, and to dust it for him.

Armandale accepted this sign of homage, and motioned her back to her shawls.

"Nothing, thank you, my dear," he said, seating himself. "I called only to know that you were well, and I am glad that I called at a fortunate moment."

"If you mean to keep me here," said Mrs. Spencer, earnestly,

"please make her let me do as I like in my own room. It is not much to be allowed to lie where one likes, and this mattress can't be a very expensive one. Will you?"

"I would send you in the softest featherbed money could buy, my valued Laura," said Armandale, "but that it might injure your health to be too luxurious; and besides, I hope to put you into another place before long."

"The churchyard, I hope," said Laura, despairingly.

"No," said her husband, answering as if to the most matter of fact inquiry. "No. I trust that many a day will dawn before that melancholy duty devolves upon me. Do they take care of you here?"

"If they would only let me be. And I took a fancy to go out in the moonlight last night, and she locked me in. The moonlight looked a little like what it used to be in Lucknow, and I thought I should like a stroll. It was very cruel of them not to let me."

"I am truly sorry, my dear Laura, that you should have been debarred from refreshing any Indian recollections. I should have been enchanted to stroll by your side, as I could have assisted your memory. But unless I can accompany you, perhaps you had better postpone your enjoyment."

She looked up at him, felt that he was taunting, and trying to pain her, but she had become too callous to heed it much.

"I hope you will soon accompany my coffin," she said.

"I am vexed that you insist on conjuring up so painful a scene," replied he, in a tone that was brutal from its mockery of politeness. "Dismiss such a thought, and tell me whether you would like to go out for a drive."

"I don't care about it."

"But if I cared about it?"

"I must do as you wish, but I should rather be let alone."

"Your amiable compliance shall be rewarded by your having your own way. But now listen to me. No, not with closed eyes. Please to kneel up, that I may be quite sure you are attending."

The woman, with a low murmur, rose up into the attitude he prescribed. As she did so, and to steady herself, she hastily put out her hand, and it rested for a moment on his knee as he sat by the couch. It was but for a moment, for he instantly drew his knee from under her hand, and pushed a chair forward to be her support. It was the act of a second, but it told a history.

"I—I beg your pardon," she said, and what there was left of womanly feeling in her seemed stirred by the insult.

"A *bagatelle*," he said, carelessly. "It is forgotten, but do not you forget this. Have a morning-dress and bonnet got ready, so that you can put them on at a quarter of an hour's notice. I will send a milliner to you. I may want you. That is all. *Adieu*. I will make all right with the beast downstairs."

She was sobbing as he went out, but she was left "to weep her tears alone."

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## THE EMBASSY.

THE medical gentleman, hastily called in to Maria, had at once given a very strong opinion against the poor girl's recovery. The casualty itself, though of a very grave character, he said, was not so severe as to preclude hope, but the condition of the sufferer was most unfavourable. The usual treatment was adopted, and it was impossible that anything that skill or tenderness could suggest should be wanting at a couch on one side of which stood Dr. Halstone, and on the other Margaret Arundel. But the hope was against hope.

Forbidden to utter a word, Maria's impatience to communicate with those about her, but chiefly with Margaret, was at first distressing. She endeavoured to speak with her fingers, but it happened that Mrs. Arundel was not very adroit at this language, and she felt that Maria became excited at her failure to make herself understood. Kindly and earnestly she implored the girl to be calm and still, assured her that all she could say was known; that she was with those who were resolved, if God permitted it, to effect a cure, but that all depended upon her abject submission to the orders of Dr. Halstone.

"Will you not, for *my* sake," said Margaret, in the gentlest whisper, "do what I ask of you?"

Maria faintly smiled, and placed to her pale lips the fair hand of the young wife, in token of resignation. But her eyes wandered, and it was clear that her mind was too restless to permit her body to rest.

"If you will be very good," said Margaret, after watching her anxiously for some time, "I will let you say a very few words. Ah! no," she said, laying her hand upon the girl's mouth, "not so. Silence, now; and I will come back directly."

She brought a little porcelain slate and a pencil. It was characteristic of our thoughtful Margaret that she took care that the pencil would write well, and also that she did so before she entered the room, and allowed the impatient patient to see what was in hand.

Maria's eyes brightened as the tablet was placed in a convenient position, and Margaret, supporting her hand, guided it to the slate.

Then there came a flush over the girl's brow, and this Margaret did not understand, or attributed it to a wrong cause. In truth, it was a pang of womanly vanity, that even then made itself felt. Maria knew that she wrote an ill-regulated hand, and was not confident even about her spelling; and these she was going to expose to an accomplished rival.

"Now, only a very few words, you know," said Margaret, softly.

The tone was so sweet, and the perfect sincerity of the speaker, in her expression of anxiety for her charge, was so clear, that Maria's eyes filled with tears, and they had to be wiped away before she could begin.

"Any marks will do," said Margaret. "No one can possibly write

comfortably in such a position, but I shall be able to make out the meaning." Maria wrote—

*"How good you are to me."*

"I will take away the slate directly," said Margaret, in a low voice, "if you exert yourself to write anything of that sort. If you wish to make me happy, you will be obedient and good. Everybody is most anxious that you should get well, and we will all do anything in the world for you. And we are sure that you feel kindly to me and all of us. So no need of writing about that. Only, if there is anything you wish for——"

Maria wrote—

*"I shall die, but I will be good."*

Margaret's soothing words, in answer to this, need not be set down. She had not heard Dr. Halstone's own decision on the case, and into its report to her Mr. Arundel had perhaps infused more hope than the doctor's language quite warranted. It was natural that a little addition should be again made by Margaret, and she poured into the girl's ear assurances that her life depended on her observance of orders.

But Maria's faint smile testified that she knew better.

*"I will be good,"* she wrote again.

"Is there any home care upon your mind?" suggested Mrs. Arundel. "Will you write down anything, and we will send there. I know the address; never mind that."

The girl looked up wonderingly, having forgotten that Boosey had been at the house. The Ayah would, a second time, have almost found her way thither blindfolded.

*"There is that child"*—Maria began, but Mrs. Arundel stayed her hand.

"She shall be sent to directly—told that you are ill—but in a place of safety—desired to conduct herself properly, and—shall we send her, or the servant, a little money to go on with?"

*"No need. But if you will send the message——"*

"It shall be done immediately," said Mrs. Arundel, stopping the writer the moment her meaning was known.

*"I was very rude to——"*

"Rude to nobody, dear child," said Margaret, caressingly. "Do you not know that we are all deeply your debtors (and I am most of all) for your coming to tell us that we had been deceived. Think of nothing, except that you have done us all a great service, and we will not even thank you for it until you get well. Now, will you try to sleep? I will be in the room—I will not go away at all, and I will show you how to call me to you, if you wish it."

And, tying one end of a slight ribbon to a little toy-bell (a plaything of Duke's) which she suspended from the hook of a watch arch-stand, on a table—it is a tiny detail, but I want you to know how helpful she was—she fastened the other end to a finger of her patient.

"There," she said; "now, that little tinkle is made in a moment, and another will bring me to you with the slate. Surely, you will now be able to sleep?"

Maria laid her hand gratefully on that of Margaret, and looked beggily at the slate.

"Must I? Well, only this once, then, until you have slept."

Maria wrote—

*"If I die in the night, will you kiss me before they take me away."*

"You will not die in the night, dear," said Margaret, with tears in her eyes. "God put it in your heart to do a brave and kind thing, and we may hope that He will let you live to see the good you have done. But will you not let me kiss you now?"

Maria would then have spoken, and Margaret saw it, and laid her hand once more on the girl's lips, and then kissed her forehead and cheek. No, woman, not as if she were in charity exposing herself to a contamination which she would brave, but could not help feeling, but as an angel sent with a message of love to some sorrowing and wandering mortal might, in compassion and sympathy, touch the brow of the earth-born, in sign that what the Master had loved, His would love too.

Then, darkening the room, Margaret gave a final pressure of Maria's hand, and withdrew to a sofa, whence she watched for some time, and was at last rewarded by hearing the breathing which tells of sleep. And then Margaret knelt to pray. Maria was not forgotten in her prayer, but the day had brought forth much that called for the young wife's petitions on her own behalf, and long was her review of the events of that day, and earnest her prayer that all might be swayed for good to those whom she loved.

Had she known how Philip, her husband, was employed at that same hour, I think that her heart would have fairly overflowed.

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Three days passed, and Maria still lay, tended with every care, but her case making no apparent advance or retreat. Not so the interests of others of whom we have spoken.

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"A father always knows too much and too little of his son, they say, Philip," said old Mr. Arundel to the latter, as they sat down in the library, after giving a solemn pledge to Blanche and Geraldine that they would soon come up to coffee.

This was the day following the scene at Mr. Keckling's. Mr. Arundel had sent word to his son that the sooner they met the better, and Philip was entirely of the same opinion. Once in the house, he was a prisoner without parole, for his sisters refused to listen to any terms that implied his leaving them again—

"Unless," said Geraldine, "it is to fetch his wife here."

For they, in spite of all their adoration of Philip, had never been able to believe that Margaret was to blame, and when their father told them as much as it was proper to tell single young ladies, namely, that it had been discovered that the parties had been at a sort of cross-purposes, and untruths had been used in order to widen the breach, it was with great difficulty that the Contingent could be restrained from charging into Mr. Keckling's house, and at once carrying off Margaret in triumph.

Philip looked grave, but said nothing to this, and followed his father to the library.

"I am sure I ought to have had no secrets from you, my dear father," replied Philip.

"Perhaps," said the old gentleman, with an attempt at unusual gravity, though he was much too happy to be grave, and much too wise to be didactic, "it might be as well to say that you ought to have had no secrets but such as you could properly tell your father, sir. But I suppose young men are all alike."

O the comfort those eight words have been to generations on generations of forgiving parents! O the loophole by which they have escaped from the duty of making any special protest against wrong! On the whole I am not so sure that the sentiment has worked so well for young women, and that its being popular has not had something to do with a certain social evil, which the police find it difficult to keep out of the sight of Respectability. But the belief may certainly be called a real blessing to fathers, and mothers too, unless they have old-fashioned notions.

"We will not talk upon the subject more than we can help," said Mr. Arundel, "but I may say that if I had known that person before the affair was broken off, I should have been very unhappy about you, my boy. I mean, that I should have thought her a person whom you might find it painful to shake off at all."

"Was it *not*?" said Philip, with real feeling.

"I need not ask you if you did all that was proper."

"John Claxton managed it all. I thought that the kindest way, as he knew all about it. He decided what I should do. You know that he is the man to insist on what is right."

"Yes, all very fine. And he could come here, and sit opposite, and drink my wine, and take your hint to go away with you for a cigar at the club, and know all the time where you were going. But I suppose half the fathers in London are in my case, or will be, so we must not complain. Well, your friend, Mr. Jack Claxton, has told you everything."

"Everything, he says. And I come to you, my dear father, for advice. You'd throw something at me, I suppose," said the son, laying his hand affectionately on his father's shoulder, "if I were to say how I thank you for your whole conduct and kindness."

"Why, I have been such a brute and tyrant to you all my life, that I don't wonder you are surprised at my behaving as you would wish, eh, Philip."

"By Jove, sir, if there were more fathers like you——"

"There would be more sons like you, eh? But are you sure that is so very desirable a thing? Well, yes it is, my boy," said the old man, looking proudly at his son, "and if there were nobody worse than you in the world, we should get on very well. God bless you. I only hope all the wild oats are sown now."

"Every grain, sir."

"Then there's no great harm done. I hope that poor girl won't die; the doctors are very fond of predicting the worst, in order to make you think more of the cure, and if she recovers, we will see what can be done for her. I dare say that with some money she could get a good husband in Australia. We'll see to that, of course, and now to



dismiss the subject, and come to one of a very different kind, I mean how to make amends to a loving heart that we have wronged."

Which was, of course, utterly and entirely different. But we think—as Sheridan's soldiers in the play proposed to argue—in platoons. Don't blame a man for feeling as his regiment feels.

"What course do you advise?" said Philip. "I would gladly put myself entirely in your hands. I know that you have learned to love Margaret as you do one of the girls upstairs."

"Almost, I believe," said the father, "and I think almost will be quite, when I see her making you perfectly happy. Well, do you authorize me to speak for you?"

"I entreat it."

"You wont mind my saying to her that you own you have been a good deal in the wrong. Indeed, if I like to put that part rather strongly, you wont repudiate me?"

"My dear father!"

"Mind you, I don't say that you have been a good boy, if you have not been a very bad one; but I don't put it on that ground; but I'm older than you, Philip, and therefore of course I know more of women."

Equally of course, Philip in his private mind assented to this.

"They like to be generous, they have liberal natures, Philip, and they would rather have something handsome to do in the way of forgiveness, than forgive little niggling wrongs. It's not so with us; we prefer to be injured slightly to being injured largely. They don't, because they can come out with a whole gush of pardon. So I shall not try to explain away your errors, Mr. Philip, but tell your wife you own everything; and see what she will say to that."

"I hope that she will say, Where is he?"

"I'm sure she will. You speak rather doubtfully, Philip. We are reversing parts; it is seldom the old man that is sanguine and the young one gloomy."

"I have had, perhaps, more opportunity of understanding Margaret's nature, my dear father."

"Certainly; but still—— I say, Philip," said Mr. Arundel, gravely. "I am not going on a fool's errand? There is not anything secret from me, no downright offence that a wife ought not to be asked to forgive! You are my son and a gentleman, and therefore it is impossible there can be anything that came under her eye; but there has been nothing—in a word, you have not been a guilty husband!"

"Did I ever tell you a lie, sir?"

"Never, my boy, thank God."

"I wont begin now," said Philip. "You know everything about me; and I leave my cause in your hands. But I tell you frankly that I think my best hope of a reconciliation taking place is in Margaret's feeling that she has been in the wrong."

"Which you think?"

"I *did* think so. I own that I thought her much in the wrong. I make all allowance for feeling; but a woman is not justified in leaving her husband's house upon any question of mere feeling. If

she wrote down every wrong, article by article, for Doctors' Commons, could you lay your finger on one of them, and pronounce for a separation? I was very careless, neglectful, irritable; I left her alone a good deal; I stayed out late at night; I was once seen behind the scenes at the opera when she thought I was somewhere else; once or twice I had more wine than was good for me; and before I married I had lived—as nine men out of ten live, while the tenth lives worse. Is there anything in all that, and I have put it strongly against myself, that justifies a wife in separating?"

"Not if women were reasonable beings, my dear Philip; but remember, they are not. They don't reason, and they do foolish things. But I do not think I shall do any good by trying to throw blame on Margaret."

"I don't wish it, sir, for I am sure I feel that I have been exceedingly foolish, and that she has a great deal on her side. I only suggest to you that our case is not a bad one."

"If I am happy enough to make all right, Philip, you will never let her feel that you thought her wrong. I am thinking of your future happiness."

"If we unite again," said Philip, "I shall be a wiser man, I won't say a better one, and I shall know how to set a truer value on the wife I have gained. Is not that something for a man to say; but I would say it to no man in the world but one."

"What is settled?" asked Geraldine and Blanche, in a breath, as their father and brother entered the drawing-room.

"Who goes for Margaret," asked Geraldine, "and have you ordered the brougham?"

"Philip goes, I suppose," said Blanche. "O, make haste, and then we can have a great talk with her before we go to bed."

"Not quite so fast, my loves," said Mr. Arundel. "Nothing will be done to-night; but to-morrow I hope that we may all be happy."

"I don't like delays," said Geraldine; "but I suppose you both know best."

"We humbly think so, Diney, dear," said papa, putting his arm round her waist.

"Yes," said Blanche; "but I know one thing, and that is, that if anybody I cared about had quarrelled with me, and they did not hurry and make it up the very hour and minute that they knew they might, they might not find it quite such easy work to make it up at all."

"You are quite right, Blanche," said Philip, looking at her kindly, "and I should agree with you if it were not for some other considerations of which you are not aware. In fact, you don't quite know all the circumstances."

"I hate circumstances," said Blanche.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

ALEXANDER.

MR. ARMANDALE SPENCER opened his batteries, but with no particular effect. He wrote to request an interview with Mr. Arundel, and that senator's private secretary intimated, in a curt note, that his chief's time was too much occupied to permit him to see the applicant, but that any written explanation of his wishes should be duly attended to. This suggestion by no means met Mr. Spencer's views. He endeavoured to throw himself in Mr. Arundel's way in the lobby of the House, but Mr. Arundel seeing him, suddenly took so lively and intense an interest in the conversation of an Irish acquaintance who wanted an under-secretary of stateship, or a tide-waiter's place, or any other trifle Arundel might happen to have about him, that the interview (to the astonishment of the delighted Milesian) was prolonged until the division bell gave his patron an excuse for hurrying into the chamber. Armandale took the hint.

He then called upon Mr. Claxton, and found that gentleman at chambers, but Mr. Claxton saw nobody who did not send in his card, and when Mr. Spencer's card came in, Mr. Claxton was too much engaged to see Mr. Armandale Spencer. The latter, of course, at once comprehended the defence that was going to be made against him, abandoned tentatives, and resolved on opening his *feu d'enfer* upon the Arundelian Sebastopol.

Marmaduke Arundel, eager to achieve his object, and re-unite his son and daughter-in-law, lost no time in presenting himself at Mr. Keckling's house. He sent up word to Margaret that he was there, and Mrs. Arundel, placing a trusty nurse as sentinel by the bedside of Maria, came down to her father-in-law.

"And our poor patient?" he asked, after affectionately kissing her.

"She is very quiet, poor thing," said Margaret, "and that is well. Every hour that she remains so, the stronger our hope may become. But it is a terrible peril."

"Hope on, my love, and I trust you may be rewarded for your kindness and nobleness."

"Pray don't call anything I have done by that name, papa."

The last word sounded one of good omen to the ambassador. But it perhaps only signified that Margaret's warm heart prompted her at once to resume affectionate relationship with those who had been kind to her.

"I shall call it what I please, and think it what I please too," said Mr. Arundel. "And first let me deliver a double message with which I am charged, or else I shall never be forgiven. I am to give the separate and united loves of Blanche and Geraldine, and—no, the rest of the message I will tell you presently."

Margaret coloured, and then said, smilingly, that she would return an answer to the whole message when she had had it.

"And now, dear," said Mr. Arundel, "I want to have a little talk with you where we are quite sure not to be interrupted. Have you any little boudoir of your own here, for I want to be awfully mysterious."

"Certainly," said Margaret. "Mr. Keckling has kindly given me

rooms altogether upstairs. The poor thing is in one of them, and my little orrery, as Duke calls it, is next. I am so sorry that Duke is out for a walk with his nurse, but he will be home at one o'clock to his dinner."

"Then I hope I shall see him, dear fellow. By all means let us go upstairs."

Margaret conducted him to the pretty little room which she had spoken of, and the name whereof her child had corrupted as she has told—the original, by no means a piece of sentiment by our ex-dissenter, but a whim of Mr Keckling's, being, of course, the oratory. It was really one for Margaret, however, as may be imagined. Some fragmentary toys, which no mother can ever quite succeed in keeping out of her card-basket, and work-box, and china, or any other place where they have no business to be, made Arundel think of old times and young faces in his own household, and of an older and sweet face whose owner used in vain to remonstrate against dolls on the drawing-room mantelpiece, and the intrusion of Noah and his red and rigid family among Chinese ivories and Parian statuettes.

"Any one in the next room?" he asked.

"Nurse and poor Maria," said Mrs. Arundel, softly; "but if I shut the door between they cannot hear us."

"Send nurse down stairs, please."

"If you wish it," said Margaret. "But I must arrange for hearing my patient."

She returned, glad to say that Maria was asleep, but she had put the bell-ribbon within her reach. And closing the door, she took her seat, not without considerable trepidation, for she had naturally guessed something of the nature of Arundel's errand.

This too, he thought he might take for granted.

"And now, my dearest child, for I have always thought of you as mine, ever since a certain day when we were at church together, and I may say before that, I suppose that you know what is in all our minds, and that it is the same thing which is in your mind too."

"I can hardly mistake what you mean," said Margaret, who began to feel a most unheroinelike inclination to have a cry.

"It would be, then, a most delightful thing if we both arrived at the same conclusion without a great deal of talk about it. When people all love one another, they have not need of many words to clear up a misunderstanding."

"Yes," said Margaret, not exactly knowing what she was saying.

"Now, dearest Margaret, I am an old man, and I suppose that my days are not likely to be very long in the land. All the happiness I can have in this world now—since I have lost a wife whom I loved better than my life—is in the happiness of my children, and they must not deny me that comfort, for God knows I have not deserved that they should be unkind to me."

Margaret caught at his hand, impulsively, but did not speak.

"Perhaps I have not quite so much right to make this appeal to you, dear, for though you are my child to all intents and purposes, I have not been able, time has not been allowed me, to do much for you—but I think you know how the old man loves you?"

"You have been all kindness," said Margaret, with the tears coming on.

"Well, then, if you believe in my love, dear child, you must believe what I tell you."

"Why, of course I will," said Margaret, looking up at him through wet eyes, but with one of her curiously *naïve* expressions of surprise. Utterly unheroic.

"Then you must believe me when I say that there is one who loves you even better than I do, as he ought. My dear child, Philip, your husband, is as devoted to you as he ever was in any hour of your life. And when I have said that, and you have believed it, is there a great deal more to say before I come to my girls' message?"

He rose, placed his arm round her, and raised her to his side. Her head rested on his heart, and she sobbed audibly. He thought the game was won. Some men think that when a woman begins to cry, she gives in, but it is not always so. Sometimes you smite the rock and the waters gush forth, but the rock remains just where it was before the outburst.

"Then," he said, after a pause, during which he continued to embrace her fondly, "I will finish that message."

"No," said Margaret, looking up with a face full of distress, but still as if she had something she meant to say; "please do not, dear papa, because I can guess at all its kindness."

"Is that a reason, dear?" said Arundel.

"But it would be very painful to have to send an answer——"

"That is exactly what they forbid you to do, my darling. You are to bring an answer, or rather to be an answer."

"Yes, I know, I felt it was that, dear girls," said Margaret, "and you must give them my dearest love, and ——. Papa," she said, wiping her eyes, and speaking with a sad firmness, "you wish me to come home to you, and I must not."

"I do indeed, my love, and so do we all, and that you should come home, as you rightly call it, and will always I hope feel it,—that you should come home directly."

"And meet——"

"All."

"It cannot be," said Margaret, in the same sorrowful tone.

"My dear child, do you think that I have any claim to ask you why you should say this? If you do——"

"You have a right, every right to ask me everything," said Margaret; "but if you would take what I say without making me give you any more pain, for I am sure I do——"

"You do indeed, love, though unwillingly. But if it is only pain to myself, I can bear that, and perhaps do good by bearing it. Tell me, then, why I should not, as I fondly hoped to do, take you back with me to the Square this very hour."

"Must I say?"

"I ask you, dear, because I hope to show you that your reason is not a good one."

"Philip does not love me," said Margaret, with an effort. "He never really loved me, and I—I—am so miserable."

Again Arundel pressed her to his heart.

"Dear love," he said, "this is an idle dream, a ghost that you are conjuring up to frighten away your own happiness. You have lived out of the world, my love, and therefore you may listen to one who has lived in it. It rarely happens that in the early part of married life there does not come one of these clouds, especially when the acquaintance has not been long, and the match is a love-match, as yours, my dearest, I rejoice to say, was. It is no light or easy thing for two beings to learn to comprehend one another so thoroughly as to become one, the work is a delicate one, and if it is disturbed by any accident, there are tears, and distress, and a belief that all is over. But if husband and wife are truly good, and ordinarily trustful, the storm breaks, and passes away, and they are thenceforth one till death, and beyond it."

"If they have loved," murmured Margaret.

"And you loved Philip!"

"O, so well, so dearly," said she, with a shiver.

"And you love him still!"

"I will love him till I die," said Margaret, "but I can never be his wife again. I know that he does not love me, and I could not again bear what I have gone through. O, to be the constant companion of one for whom you would give your life if it could save him from a grief, and to feel that his eyes looked coldly on you, and yet not so coldly as his heart—I cannot bear it. Papa," she said passionately, "I am making no charge against Philip. He thought he loved me, and did not, but I acquit him of blame. I hope, I pray that he nor you nor any one thinks so meanly of me as to suppose that any of a number of small things—I am ashamed to speak about them—could be in my memory or make me angry with him. They were cruel only as proofs that he cared not for me. I would never have resented them, I would never have let him even try to explain them away. It was the one burning, bitter conviction that he did not love me that drove me from him—is there not some story about a living man chained for his crimes to a dead man—what is that to a living loving heart chained to one that is ice and stone to it. Do not ask me any more, dear, dear Mr. Arundel——"

"What!" he said, mournfully; "papa no longer."

"Yes, papa a hundred times," she said, clinging to him; "but do not. I have told you all the fearful truth. Now pity me, and love me, if you can."

"Love you, dearest, yes, to the last. But will you refuse to believe a father, when he speaks to you of his son. Philip loves you deeply and well. He always did, but he loves you now more than ever. Sorrow and thought have done much with him. Will you refuse to believe me?"

"You will break my heart," said Margaret, "but you can never alter the truth. All the love that Philip had for woman," she said in a low voice, "was given——"

The tinkling of a very small bell, rung violently, was heard by both.

"Was given *there*," said Margaret, extricating herself from his arms, and hastening to the door between the rooms.

She opened it, and close to it lay Maria, who had crawled from her bed, and to the door, but was unable to do more. She held the ribbon in her hand, and looked up at Margaret like a child who knows it has merited rebuke.

"O, Maria," cried Mrs. Arundel, "how very sad, how very cruel!"

It was not a hard task for Margaret to raise the wasted form of the poor girl from the ground, but when she sought to replace her in the bed, Maria resisted, and pointed to a chair.

Mrs. Arundel feared to contest the point, lest the wilful girl should begin to speak. She placed Maria in a large easy chair, and covering her with a dressing-gown and shawls, whispered earnest reproach. Maria smiled and demanded her slate.

"You don't deserve it, indeed," said Margaret. "How can you be so unkind?"

"*I am a bad thing,*" wrote Maria.

Margaret rubbed out the words. "Why did you not ring for me, as I asked you?" she said, as one talks to a child. "And why will you not let me put you back in bed?"

"*Will you do something I ask?*"

"Anything, only let me have my own way with you."

"*Promise?*"

"I promise. Now then, I will wheel the chair to the bedside."

"*Send for Philip,*" wrote Maria, most distinctly, as if to give emphasis to her words.

Margaret started, and the writing swam before her.

"Maria," she exclaimed, and then instantly recollecting herself;

"Ah, not a word."

The exclamation reached and alarmed Mr. Arundel, who hurried in.

"What is it? Can I be of use? Not in bed, my poor girl—surely that is not right."

Maria pointed to the slate in Mrs. Arundel's hand, and the senator's gold eye-glass was in requisition in an instant. He caught the words, and looked doubtfully at Margaret. The sufferer beckoned impatiently for the slate.

"*Will you refuse a dying girl?*"

"No," said Mr. Arundel, "it would be wicked and cruel to refuse."

What a conflict of emotion Margaret endured at being thus suddenly placed in a new and strange position, may be imagined by those who have the skill to analyse sensation. I will not even linger to ask whether the demand was utterly hateful to her. Mr. Arundel led her aside, yet not without a kind and deprecatory gesture to Maria.

"It is most painful that this should be asked," he said, in a low voice; "but I cannot see how—in humanity, not to say as Christians, we can deny it. She *is* dying, my dear child, Dr. Halstone spoke far more plainly to us than perhaps you are aware, and to refuse——"

"Do what is right," said Margaret, hurriedly, and all in a tremble she went back to the bedroom.

Mr. Arundel sent back his carriage to Thanington Square, with orders to his servants to hurry thither as fast as horses and speed could take them, and to bring Mr. Philip. He well knew that Philip

would be traversing the library, eager for his father's return. As the carriage rattled off, Mr. Keckling came out of the parlour to Mr. Arundel.

"Just come here," said Keckling, taking the other into the hat-room on the other side of the hall. "This is pleasant at such a time."

"What next?" said Arundel.

"That infernal Armandale Spencer is in there," pointing towards the parlour.

Arundel cursed Spencer with as honest and elaborate an oath as has often devoted a hated enemy to the great Enemy.

"Amen," said Keckling, "and the hottest place in it; but meantime he is *there*. And that's not the worst. I told you of the atrocious threat uttered at Hastings."

"His wife?"

"By \* \* \*, she's there. Such a wretch. He has brought her to show that there is such a person, whom he can introduce all over London as the mother of Margaret Arundel. O, to call this beastly country a civilized one, while there is no dealing with such a ruffian as that. O if we were in Russia, with such bankers' accounts as yours and mine to draw upon."

It was clearly the duty of a part of the Constitution to have protested against this sentiment, but I am sorry to say that Mr. Arundel cordially joined in the old merchant's wish.

"But will he take money?" said Arundel.

"No, he will be introduced into society. He is good enough to say that if that is done in his own case, he will make no stipulation of the kind about his wife, who will give no trouble; but if he is not at once invited to your house and mine, to begin, he will at once cause such paragraphs to appear in the papers as shall spread the whole scandal, and this he will keep up as long as he lives."

"He has been trying to get at me——"

"He said so, with some exceedingly rude remarks upon your childishness in thinking that such devices as you employed could keep off a man who was in earnest."

"You think there is no buying him off?"

"I am ashamed to tell you what terms I have offered. I suppose that he has a hoard."

"Well, can we get a little time, to consider his terms?"

"No, he says he will have an answer at once, and has been good enough to fix the day on which he proposes that I shall have my first dinner party in his honour."

"The scoundrel. By Jove, they *have* been quick," said Arundel as the rattle of wheels was heard.

"Who?"

"I sent for Philip. That poor girl wants to see him before she dies——"

"Good Heaven, he must not meet Spencer!"

They hastened into the hall, as the door opened. But it was not the carriage, nor was it Philip; but a cab, with three men inside, and one who had been riding beside the driver.

The others alighted, and two faces were unknown to either of the



gentlemen. Not so that of the third, who was the young lawyer, Latimer Cheriton.

"Outside, Batty," said a vigorously made, though slight man, who seemed to have some blue about him somewhere, though when you did not look at him you could hardly say where.

They entered the house, shutting out their companion.

"Mr. Keckling," said Latimer, "I won't say I am sorry this happens here, as no matter where a scoundrel is trapped, but we meant to have had him in Half Moon-street. He went out early. Is he in there?"

"There is but one scoundrel in the world, Mr. Cheriton," said Arundel, "but you can't mean him."

"Armandale Spencer," said Latimer.

"No, is he the game?" exclaimed the old gentleman, delighted. "In there, in there."

"All right, Mr. Arundel," said the man with blue, respectfully touching his hat.

"I seem to know you," said Mr. Arundel.

"Know you quite well, sir, and most of the other gentlemen of the House."

At this moment the parlour door opened, and Armandale Spencer came out into the hall. He knew none of the new comers, but instinct told him that the conclave was not designed for his benefit and advantage.

"Our time is limited, Mr. Keckling," he said, "as we have several calls to make."

"I am afraid they must stand over, sir," said the man with blue.

"You are under some mistake," said Spencer, calmly.

"This is Mr. Armandale Spencer," said Keckling, with extra distinctness.

"Quite so," said the officer, with politeness. "We have a cab, Mr. Spencer. I suppose nothing more need be said to a man of business."

Armandale Spencer behaved exceedingly well. He turned livid with rage, and glared like a tiger round on the party, all of whom he supposed to be in league against him. Then, instead of bursting out with an explosion, like that which had annihilated the Hampstead Road laundry, he put on his hat, and said, quite pleasantly,

"Embarrassing, simply because, you see, Mrs. Spencer is with me."

"Mrs. Spencer shall be conveyed to her residence. I undertake that," said Latimer.

"Most kind, but one naturally hesitates to entrust one's wife to the care of an entire stranger."

Latimer was going to speak. But there would have been some awkwardness in his announcing that he had just helped to arrest his cousin's father on a criminal charge. Keckling stopped him.

"I am not a stranger to you, Mr. Spencer. I will undertake the duty."

"Then, sir, I am perfectly at ease. Forgive my weakness, if I spare myself the pain of an agonizing parting, and leave it to you to break

the news to my adoring wife. I am at your service, sir," he said. "I will write to you, Mr. Keckling. *Adieu.*"

As the officers escorted their captive to the cab, the Thanington Square carriage dashed up, and in another moment Philip was on the pavement.

"One moment," said Armandale Spencer, placing his arm in that of the man with blue. "Let me shake hands with that gentleman."

And before Philip was aware of what he was about, he had let his hand go into that of his father-in-law.

"My dear Philip," said Armandale, "how well you are looking. I should have known you anywhere, from your likeness to your dear little boy. I have an important engagement to keep, but you will find your mother-in-law Mr. Keckling's guest, and it will make her heart dance with joy and gladness to embrace you. Excuse my being obliged to be off."

And the officers drove away with Mr. Spencer, before Philip, whose mind had been on a very different subject, had time to regain his recollections. He darted into the house, where his father awaited him.

"You sent for me," said Philip, laying his hands delightedly on his father's shoulders, and that means victory. Where is she?"

He looked so unfeignedly delighted, that his father could hardly bear to damp his happiness, but there was no help for it; and in a few words he explained why Philip had been summoned.

The young husband turned deadly pale.

"Yet it is with Margaret's consent," he said, after a pause.

"It is by Margaret's desire," replied his father.

"I have no choice," said Philip Arundel. "Margaret has a right to command this trial. Would you—will you say that I am here?"

A few minutes later, and two men and two women were in that chamber together.

Margaret had been unable to prevail on Maria to return to the bed. I will not say what thought on the girl's part induced her to prefer receiving Philip, for the last time, in the attitude and place she had chosen. There rise in the heart of a loving woman, some subtle thoughts of kindness which few men appreciate in all their delicacy. Philip never knew what especial pang of memory Maria designed to save him. I will not say that the thought did not occur to Margaret.

Philip bent his head as he entered the room that held his wife, and her who had once been as a wife to him. He had not expected to find Margaret there. I know not whether she had designed to be absent during the interview, but the girl had claimed her promise to concede "anything," and had prayed that she would stand by her side. And there stood Margaret, agitated, pale, but beautiful—and there sat Maria, far calmer, but with the death-sign upon her yet charming face. And to them came, under what circumstances, the husband and the lover?

Margaret trembled so violently, that the dying girl was conscious of her agitation, and for a moment they reversed their places, and Maria, with a smile and a touch on the hand of Margaret, sought to

assure her that she had nothing to fear from having permitted such an interview.

Mr. Arundel was, naturally, the first to speak.

"Philip," he said; "I have told you under what circumstances your presence has been asked here. The poor sufferer whom you see is, of course, not allowed to utter a word, but if the sight of you can afford her——"

The man of the world, once in the presence of actual sorrow, had little powers of endurance. His words broke off, and he turned away, and affected to gaze intently upon a beautiful drawing, by Mrs. Arundel, that hung upon the wall. It was a copy of a celebrated picture—the Magdalen at the feet of the Lord.

Maria signed for her slate.

*Forgive me everything. I shall never trouble you again.*

Philip's instinct as he read the words was to seize the hand of Maria, and ask her pardon for all wounds he might have inflicted on her. But there stood his wife, for whose sake it had all been done. What words could he use?

"Can you hesitate?" said Margaret, with as much calmness as she could infuse into her voice. "Do you not take her hand?"

Thus bidden, Philip clasped the wasted hand which in other days—but what matter such recollections. And he strove to say such things as in other days he would have said without striving. And Maria allowed him to finish his hopes that ere long she might be able to support conversation, and his prayers that she would allow herself to be guided by the orders of doctors and nurses. It was the last and only revenge she took upon her faithless lover to let him for a few moments labour and struggle to utter what man might well say to woman, but what it is hard to say with man's wife listening to every syllable.

Then she wrote again.

*You have been very good. God bless you. Will you see me buried? And will you have some Chrise—I never could spell it, but you know how fond I was of them. Please plant some over me.*

Philip hid his face in his hands and sobbed aloud.

*I know you will. May it be so?* These last words she addressed to Margaret.

"All shall be as you wish, poor child," said Margaret, crying freely. "But will you not comfort him. Say—no, no—write three words to him, write that *you* forgive him."

*"Forgive him. He was always the kindest and——."*

"Until I came," said Margaret, passionately. "Write that you forgive me, will you not? I knew nothing of—of—it all, but it is no light matter to come between a heart and its love. I know you have forgiven me."

*"I love you,"* wrote Maria. *"Perhaps, if I go to Heaven, we may both love him there. See how he is crying."*

"Philip," said Margaret, "do not agitate her. She is very weak."

*"She is very strong,"* wrote Maria, rapidly, and with a smile.

"We pray that you may become so," said Philip, with the tears in his voice. "But pray, pray be guided——"

*"I have one more petition. Will you grant it? Only one."*

"What can we do?" said both in a breath.

*"Let me see you kiss one another."*

Was it to be wondered at that they hesitated, and looked at her, rather than at each other. She gazed at them for a moment or two, and then colour came over face and brow.

*"I humbly beg your pardon. It was presumption, I beg your pardon. It is not for such as me to——"*

But Philip's eyes had followed her words, and he took the slate from her, and held it before Margaret.

"Can you bear this, Margaret?" he said, gently.

Once more Philip Arundel held his wife in his arms. Once more his lips met hers.

"WHO SAYS I AM NOT STRONG?" cried Maria, too impatient to write. The sound of her voice instantly separated them, and they, with Arundel, bent over her, imploring her silence.

"I am strong," she repeated, but it was very feebly. "Stronger, sir, than even you, for while I was crouching at that door I listened to all that you said, and I thought that what you could not do, poor Maria would try. And I have done it. They will never part any more. In all my life I have done one good thing. O, me, what is that to set against all the rest?"

"Poor child," said Mr. Arundel, "this must be stopped. Will you not be silenced, if not for your own sake, for the love you have for those around you."

Maria dropped her hands as if in token of submission, and her face wore a very pleasant smile. She was still for a few moments, when the fresh young voice of a child, joyously exclaiming "Mamma," was heard outside, as was that of a nurse seeking to hush a noise that might disturb the patient.

*"O, might I see your child?"* she hastily wrote. *"O, do let me, and then I will go to bed and trouble no one again."*

Margaret hastened to fetch in little Duke, radiant with health and spirits, and gaily adorned with the dainty finery in which young mothers love to array their children.

The boy had begun his delighted prattle, but it was stilled as he gazed wonderingly at the group in the bedroom. His grandfather's white hair first caught his eye, but then he recognised the figure of his father, who had not been seen by him for so many a day, and who had turned sadly from the others.

"Why, it's my papa," screamed out the child, struggling from his mother's arms, and scampering to Philip; for whom, despite the father's indifference, Duke had a singular liking.

Philip took him up, kissed him warmly, and said—

"The poor lady is ill, my love, very ill. We must not disturb her."

"But I shall go and kiss her," said Duke; "that will do her good. It does mamma good for me to kiss her when she is going to cry."

He went back, not noisily, to Maria, and held up his little rosy mouth for her salute.

"God bless you! God bless you, darling!" cried Maria, wildly

excited, and throwing her arms round the child ; “and if God will let a poor mother meet her own lost baby in heaven, perhaps he—— O my Willy, my little, little Willy !”

It was over. She fell back, and died, with her lover's child at her knees.

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Mr. Arundel was the first to recover self-possession ; and his first act was to hurry the astonished child from the room. Margaret, with a wild cry, threw herself into her husband's embrace. They were once more united, and it was in the solemn presence of the Sacrament of Death.

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## CHAPTER THE LAST.

### SOME ENDS OF A CUT KNOT.

I AM sure that all my readers are too well-bred, and too kindly considerate, to imitate the vulgarians of the theatres ; who, when the last important point in the play or opera has been made, get up, and begin hatting and shawling, and going out, and either disturbing the performers, or leaving them to finish to bare benches. I shall be attended to most obligingly while I am briefly dismissing the more prominent of the actors and actresses in the drama on which the curtain is about to fall.

And first we will clear the stage of all rascaldom. I wish I might do this in the summary way in which I once saw a terrible melodrama concluded at a place of entertainment formerly, but not then, under the command of the Lady of the silver laugh, which laugh gladdens audiences no more—need I to any man who has reached years of discretion name the name of Nisbett ? All the personages, evil and good—but what good and evil they had been working I could in no sort comprehend then, nor can I conjecture now—had mingled on the stage, the back of which was the dwarf wall of a country churchyard. Presently into that churchyard marched, Indian file, divers soldiers, who, levelling their muskets over the wall, and letting fly, did show themselves such apt judges of right and wrong, that when the smoke cleared off, all the wicked, to the number of, I think, about half-a-dozen, lay dead, while all the good were hugging, and blessing, and giving one another in marriage. If we could make war on that principle, I suppose that even Mr. Bright would not object to it. But we cannot ; nor can even I so get rid of my bad people. I must give them separate sentence.

Alban Cheriton was seen no more for some months. During this time he had wandered, it is supposed, about the country—how subsisting, no person could tell. But at the end of that period a letter was received by his father at St. Oscars, informing him that his son had permitted a recruiting officer to enlist him in the army, but when the sergeant, proud of his handsome but haggard recruit, had taken

him before the magistrate to be attested, the soldier burst out into a frantic oration, abused the sergeant for a kidnapper and the justice for an accomplice, and having nearly strangled one of the constables who sought to restrain him, evinced such unmistakeable insanity that he had to be conveyed to the asylum for the district. His afflicted father at once caused him to be removed to private care, but his malady was found to be of the worst character; and the once brilliant and sceptical Alban Cheriton is now alternately a raving maniac, and a still more pitiable, sebbing, crouching, whining idiot. It is needless to say that he is treated with all kindness and wisdom, but the best prayer that even his mother can make for him is that he "may be delivered from this body of death."

We parted with Armandale Spencer as he was being conveyed to one of her Majesty's safe places. Why he was thus taken away at the moment when he was dictating terms to the Arundel-Keckling alliance, may be imagined from the conversation held between Mr. Earnshaw and Mr. Harris in the theatre near Clare-market. The former had the merit of devising a scheme, which the latter aided him most effectually to carry out. Earnshaw, feeling that Mr. Keckling was losing sight of his value, determined either to restore himself to consideration or obtain a guerdon which should render him indifferent to a master's future favours. It will be remembered that in the early part of our tale it was mentioned that Mr. Keckling had despatched this person to India to obtain information respecting the parents of his favourite and *protégée*. Earnshaw gave his employer most of the details he had gathered, but, like a prudent man, he kept some of them to himself, and he deemed that the pertions he had embezzled might be available for his plan. Therefore, with the assistance of Harris, he concocted a set of charges against Mr. Armandale Spencer, in connexion with a daring attempt to do upon a small scale that which men of business remember was all but successful upon a large one, some years ago—namely, to victimize simultaneously a number of banks, by the presentation of forged letters of credit. I am unable to say whether Armandale Spencer was actually guilty in the matter. I am inclined to think that he had fully intended to be, but had backed out from suspicion of his proposed accomplices. Be this as it may, his two enemies, with the assistance of the dates, documents, and other evidence procured by Earnshaw in India, did put together so evil-looking a case, supported by affidavits which they framed and were of course prepared to swear to—affidavits designed to supply everything that might be wanting in the structure of their narrative—that when the whole was submitted by Mr. Harris, in the most businesslike and plausible manner, to Latimer Cheriton, that young and eager lawyer entertained no suspicion that he had a good deal more than the truth before him. And on the representation of the grave Earnshaw, (whom he knew,) that the proceedings for the extirpation of Armandale Spencer would be very gratifying to Margaret's friends, though they did not wish to appear as vindictive agents against her father, Latimer dashed at his work with all the delight of an energetic lawyer. Armandale was arrested, as we have seen.

The first thought of most men would have been vengeance ; but Mr. Spencer was wiser, and his first thought was bail. He of course at once required this at the hands of Mr. Arundel and his son, but their reply was unfavourable. This was of the less consequence, as the committing magistrate refused to take bail at all.

Thus within four walls, and with no probability of getting out of them until after a trial which, if it did not convict him of the alleged crime (and I fancy his recollection helped him to some awkward particulars of which Harris and Earnshaw were ignorant), would certainly brand him with some marks that would exclude him from London society, Armandale Spencer considered that it was best to eschew revenge and make terms. Now had the Arundels prosecuted, this might have been difficult ; but luckily he had to do with two men who were not over-scrupulous.

*Bref*, in order to save all scandal, an arrangement was made. The Arundels had nothing to do with it beyond Mr. Arundel's handing Mr. Keckling a blank cheque on Messrs. Coutts. As it was never presented, it may be imagined that whatever disbursements were effected, Mr. Keckling himself chose to make, out of his jealous love of Margaret. Neither had Mr. Keckling anything to do directly with the negotiations, beyond sending Mr. Latimer Cheriton a hint that any further zeal was unnecessary, and a very handsome piano-forte to the lawyer's pretty Lizzie. But somehow, it chanced that when that invaluable institution for impeding justice, the grand jury, had to consider what they should write upon the bill that set out Mr. Spencer's errors, there happened to be such an absence of evidence that the Grandeur in question could inscribe only a negative record. Mr. Armandale Spencer was discharged from royal custody, and made instant and honest preparations for leaving England, the more rapidly that a certain sum of money, and by no means a small one, was to be paid to him by Messrs. Earnshaw and Harris on the deck of the American steamer, five minutes before she left Liverpool. He was, of course, to be accompanied by his unhappy wife.

I wish that I had not to write the words which I have now to set down. But in a Wolverhampton newspaper of not very old date appears the following paragraph :—

"It having been determined to drain and clear a long-abandoned mine, the shaft of which is on Granthorp Heath, about four miles from Chartley-in-the-Wold, in order to discover whether it had not, as is believed, been far too hastily given up after the owner's bankruptcy, some thirty years since, the necessary steps have been taken. When the water had been pumped out, and the miners descended, they found, among the masses of rubbish, old iron, and other things that had from time to time fallen or been hurled into the pit, the skeleton of a woman, apparently of rather advanced life. Some fragments of what were probably the unfortunate creature's garments were also found, but in such a state as to make identification impossible. There is no clue whatever to the mystery, no information is obtainable of any person answering such a description having disappeared within the memory of any of the inhabitants of the district, and at present the conclusion is that the remains are those of

some unfortunate tramp or gipsy, who, bewildered on a dark night on the remote and desolate moor, had accidentally been precipitated down the unprotected shaft."

Such was the natural solution of the mystery. But there was one man, then thousands of miles away, and living in luxury in an American State, who, if he ever saw that paragraph, knew that the writer was mistaken. That man could tell how, having settled the day of meeting two other men on board the packet, he had departed from London, taking with him the wretched woman whose life had been one long degradation, thanks to the cold wickedness of the man who had wedded her. How, with some carelessly spoken pretext about not over-fatiguing an invalid, he had broken the Liverpool journey by stopping half way, and how he had contrived to bring the unsuspecting woman into the Black Country, of which he had managed to learn enough for his devilish purpose. He could tell how craftily he had lured her on until they were beyond the reach of other eyes and ears, when his savage commands to her to "Come on," and the horribly dreary aspect of the desolate moor, on which the shadows were darkening, awakened suspicion of his purpose. That her terror only incensed him, that threats and blows followed, and that at length the poor over-awed creature trembled after him as he strode onwards to where a sign, some old woodwork ominously (yet with false omen) resembling a gibbet, told him that he had found the place he sought. Then, if he dared, he could tell of the last supplications of the miserable woman—the once beautiful Laura—for a few hours of life, of a ruffianly clutch and rush to the pit's mouth—of a hideous and agonized shriek as he launched his living burden down the awful abyss, and of the dull, shuddering sound, a moment later, as the suddenly disturbed water closed upon the victim. But he would not tell it, for he resumed his journey alone; and having received his bribe, he sailed, a rich and unencumbered man, to a home in the West. I know not whether Satan has yet claimed his own.

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Enough of the wicked and the ill-fated. *Meliora canamus.*

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The re-union of Philip and Margaret, so strangely brought about, proved the happiest event of their lives. Philip became a graver and more thoughtful man, and began to discover something of the real beauty and nobleness of the character of her whom he had married only for her attractions and amiability. And as he gradually sobered down day by day, and learned that the true dignity of married life, as well as its true happiness, is found in wedlock's happy union of a demand for our best energies, with a proffer of our best repose, his views deepened and expanded until he began to conceive something of the meaning of the word Home. That knowledge once gained, the rest is easy; and Margaret, loved and loving, had seldom cause even to murmur into his ear the affectionate remonstrance that was the very strongest argument—save a kiss—that she ever employed to her husband. Their child grows in strength and beauty, but as it is dangerous for a child to grow up under such circumstances, sharing





*The Iron Pit.*



the undivided love and admiration of its parents, I believe that there are reasons for supposing that there will be a modification of Duke's position at no very distant date.

John Claxton, having pretended to be a barrister long enough to please his wealthy uncle, to whom he posted many Parliamentary blue books (which he got from Mr. Arundel for nothing, and which have cost so much at Westminster that they are mildly charged for at St. Martin's-le-Grand, so there was no extravagance in the matter), was informed by his uncle that the sooner a young man married the better. Mr. Claxton immediately communicated this piece of information to Miss Geraldine Arundel, by whom it was very favourably received, and they spent the honeymoon at Burford Bridge; and I should think it would almost be worth anybody's while to marry for the sake of doing the same thing. Blanche Arundel still owns that pretty name, but from something I noticed at Brighton—however, that is *her* business.

Nobody, I suspect, wants to hear any more about Aunt Henrietta and her unlucky husband. Yet if she had not made Margaret take off her bonnet when she shot at the target, Philip Arundel might not have been stricken to the heart; and therefore, whatever happiness he and his wife enjoy, Aunt Henrietta, for one, considers that they owe to her. Whether they share in that belief I will not say; they do not encourage her visits to their house (I ought to have said that they have got such a nice house in South Kensington, and may often be seen looking at the national pictures, and hoping they will never be moved again), but they often send her presents when she is in trouble. And once, to the great dissatisfaction of Duke's pretty and orderly nurse, that child was, at Aunt Henrietta's urgent appeal, permitted to spend a day—not in Gower-street, the Spencers have had to vacate half-a-dozen places since Gower-street, but somewhere in those regions—whence he returned, having had exactly everything in the world to eat and drink that he ought not to have had, having torn his red Knickerbocker breeches (well, they *are* that, and not trousers), and having learned a conversational invocation to the Deity, used without intentional impropriety by many vulgar women, but, as may be imagined, no part of Margaret's vocabulary. So he is never to go there any more. Aunt Henrietta has by no means grown less self-indulgent, nor does she quote Shakspeare and Byron less than she used to do. It is justice to her to say that she tried to make amends for the unhappy present bestowed by her upon the young couple at the wedding breakfast, by making a silversmith take the waiter's salver in part payment for a handsome teapot, which she caused him to send to Margaret, promising to pay him the balance—rather more than half the price—in a fortnight or so. As she omitted this little operation, the tradesman waited six months, and then sent in his bill to Philip, who paid it. Some people do make presents that way. I suppose I need not say much about her husband, except that he continues to maintain that nobody understands the currency question but himself, and rather vexed with Mr. Arundel that he will not get him examined before a Parliamentary Committee.

Mr. Arundel is as happy as a kind-hearted gentleman, in prosperous circumstances, and with loving children about him, can usually manage to be in this vale of tears. He gives extremely good dinners, and Philip usually sits opposite to him, and is thought to have a very neat hand at carving venison. The senator has not yet decided upon handing over the representation of Shackleby to his son; and there are perhaps two reasons why Philip will not sit for that borough. The one is that a young Mr. Ellington, who came of age about the time that the Coamings deputation came to town (and so disgracefully permitted themselves to be made horribly drunk by Philip), is looked on in the borough as the man who should succeed Mr. Arundel, inasmuch as young Ellington keeps hounds, and would spend a great deal of money in the place. Now, if I must tell, it was this same young Ellington that I saw at Brighton riding with Blanche. But there is another reason, besides a probable family arrangement, why Philip will not sit for Shackleby, and that is, that I am led to believe that the name of that borough will appear in a disagreeable schedule to the Reform Bill of 1860, unless an attorney in the place, who has great power, *pour cause*, over a certain Minister, puts on the screw very tight indeed. We shall see. But Margaret does not care about Philip's going into Parliament, and likes him to spend his evenings either with her at home or with her in society.

*Apròpos* of which I must mention one thing. Mrs. Arundel has never for a second reproached her husband for anything that we have reproached him very heartily for; and she has always scolded him heartily, in her way (which has been described), for any attempt at self-accusation. But the other night—she is fond of the Opera just now, and says that it gives her pleasant excitement without too much fatigue—Philip and Margaret were in a pit-box, seeing the beginning of the *ballet*, which does not much amuse her; but she insists on staying because Philip is fond of it. Suddenly, as some nymphs gave way right and left, on came, with a run and a bound, the very girl whom Margaret had seen Philip shawling on the night of the day he had pretended he was going fishing. You may imagine that Margaret, though she had seen her for an instant only upon that occasion, recognised her in another instant now. Philip did not; and his wife perceived that he did not. If he had known her, and seemed at all annoyed or uncomfortable, Margaret would have never said a word on the subject; but seeing that he had forgotten his Cynthia of a minute, his beautiful wife, whose restored health had brought back as much of her girlish playfulness as is becoming in a matron, thought there was no harm in saying, *slily*—

“Philip, dear, I hope the gentleman who ought to be standing somewhere with that pretty girl's shawl is not gone fishing.”

Philip Arundel looked at her quite unconscious of her meaning; and then seeing the laughing expression in his wife's eyes, he perceived that she had some fun in her words. Then his memory helped him; and he made a grasp at the play-bill. But this Margaret would not let him have; and his efforts to satisfy himself whether the dancer were really the personage of his flirtation amused her greatly. He

managed, however, to get a glance at one of the *affiches* that hang in the lobbies, as he took Margaret to the carriage.

"You see I have a better memory than you, love," she said, as they drove off. "I always told you so; but you *will* contradict."

"You have shown it to-night, dear, certainly," said Philip.

"Do you think I would remember anything to vex you?" she whispered.

His reply was a kiss, which was returned.

"But it is a shame," said Margaret, "for she is really too pretty to be so soon forgotten; and you might have thrown her my *bouquet* if you had liked."

"Then they are not the flowers I gave you."

"No, indeed; or nobody in the world should have them. Mr. Keckling sent this in afterwards, so I put yours into water—why, did you not notice, sir? I hope you are not losing all your taste for pretty girls and pretty flowers."

Philip's reply was so dreadfully affectionate that I think it would look spooney on paper, but you see the terms they are on again. I could tell you of graver and loftier conversation between them, but we have had almost enough of gravity, and I want you to know that they were as cheerful after all their troubles as if they had never had any. Cheerfulness is the only really good omen for our future, and with that omen I dismiss them to resume their path in life. They have both learned many things since they found, as they thought, that road so nicely gravelled and made smooth for them when they came out at the church-door.

It had been predicted by poor Alban that wicked little Zuleika was going to die, but I am exceedingly happy to think that I have not the duty of describing the fulfilment of that prophecy. The reason is that she is not dead at all, but dancing with very great applause at one of the east-end theatres, where she slangs all the authorities most wofully, but is very good at protecting more timid girls half as tall again as herself from any impertinence on the part of the underlings of the theatre. There is just the chance that she may keep herself proper and marry a decent man; but though I should rejoice in the event, I should be very sorry, I think, to be the decent man. Zuleika states that all the good that is in her nature was aroused by her being taken, as you remember she was, to see the man hanged. But I do not myself believe that, and I think that if external agency had anything to do with it, her heart was perhaps a little awaked by her having been for some time under the care of poor Maria.

Earnshaw was unfortunately done about the Spencer business. He paid Harris, who refused to believe that the other had not obtained a very much larger share of the reward. It was not the case, however. Mr. Keckling, who had his own ideas as to the whole affair, but kept them to himself, gave Earnshaw a small present which just covered his travelling expenses, and then remained obstinately silent as to any further gratuity. And Earnshaw knew very much better than to ask it, and be turned out of the

house. He made frantic efforts to get Harris to give him back at least half the money he had paid him, but Harris is inexorable, and advises the son of the beadle to apply for a place under Government, as the scions of the aristocracy are always provided for.

The old gentleman himself is very well and very happy. He does not care very much about any of the Arundels, whom he rather considers to have deprived him of Margaret, but still he is very courteous to them, and curiously enough he has learned to like Philip the best, after having hated him so handsomely in other days, as we have seen. But then this change may be set down to the influence of Mrs. Arundel, who loses no opportunity of persuading her old friend that her husband is a pattern of everything which a husband ought to be. So Keckling comes a good deal to the house at South Kensington, and brings Duke the most preposterously expensive presents, which of course his mamma takes away from him at the earliest opportunity that the abstraction can be performed without a howl, and is keeping them until he is old enough to know their value. He often gives Philip expensive books and maps; and as for Margaret, she is obliged to abstain from praising anything she has seen, if it is moveable, for it is pretty sure to be brought home to her in a few days. When Margaret remembers that for this generous and invaluable acquaintance she is really indebted to Aunt Henrietta, it is not wonderful that she retains very kind and grateful feelings towards that large lady, and looks deprecatingly at Philip when he speaks of her as a hippopotamus.

And now, last of all, let me say one word of those whom, I hope, few will fail to consider the persons of our story by whom the highest and the best principles are least imperfectly carried out in daily life. Henry Cheriton and his wife continue to set out in their walk and conversation the peace, the consolations, the hope of those who truly hold The Faith. One direful affliction has fallen upon them, and heavy indeed was the blow—perhaps the weaker one of the twain will find her earthly sojourn shortened by the sufferings endured in that trial time. But they sorrow not as those that have no hope. In the active duties of a busy life, in the exercise of kindness and charity to all around them, they find solace from painful memories, and in the love and the prosperity of their surviving children, Latimer and Bertha, they find an actual and an enduring happiness. And it was a day never to be forgotten by either of the two women, when Margaret, brought down to St. Qscars by her husband, was once more clasped to her aunt Nelly's embrace; and when, in traversing tenderly and affectionately over the past, and making gentle and sad reference to the letter in which poor Alban had implied that Margaret had sinned, Eleanor Cheriton repeated the words she had used when those ill-tidings came. Her child had been taught to pray.

And chrysanthemums are planted over the Creature's quiet grave. *Satis vixit.*









